Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Prairie Chicken Habitat Partnership of the Southern Red River Valley - Phase X

Laws of Minnesota 2024 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 08/04/2025

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

Funds Recommended: $3,794,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2024, Ch. 106, Art. 1, Sec. 2, Subd. 2(c)

Appropriation Language: $3,794,000 the second 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 within 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 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.

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Sabin Adams
Title: MN Public Lands Manager
Organization: MN Prairie Chicken Society / Pheasants Forever, Inc.
Address: 14241 Steves Rd SE
City: Osakis, MN 56360
Email: sadams@pheasantsforever.org
Office Number: 320-250-6317
Mobile Number: 320-250-6317
Fax Number:
Website: www.pheasantsforever.org

Location Information

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

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

The Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society in partnership with Pheasants Forever seek to protect and restore parcels within the Minnesota prairie chicken range. Focus will be on parcels that will specifically benefit prairie chickens, a species of special concern. Acquisitions will be located in the prairie or prairie/forest planning regions with an emphasis in the primary prairie chicken range. Parcels will be transferred to either the MN DNR as WMA's or the USFWS as WPA's and will be open to the public.

Design and Scope of Work

Greater prairie chickens are a grassland dependent species found largely in the beach ridges of Glacial Lake Agassiz in western Minnesota. Grassland complexes composed of various successional stages (i.e. age of habitat resulting in changing plant community), and at least 320 acres in size are required by this species. Loss of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres and conversion from grassland to row crop agriculture are the two major factors reducing quality or the habitat available to prairie chickens. As a charismatic upland gamebird, prairie chickens serve as flagship or ambassador for other grassland dependent species. Protection and restoration of habitat for the benefit of prairie chickens will, in turn, positively benefit other species such as the chestnut-collared longspur and Dakota Skipper (both species listed by the MN DNR as endangered).

The focus of this partnership is to permanently protect native and restored prairies and associated wetland habitats to both increase and stabilize prairie chicken populations in western Minnesota. This is done by focusing on remnant prairies within core and corridor areas of the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan (MNPCP). Proposed tracts, with willing sellers who value wildlife habitat, are ranked based on the following criteria: 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). Purchased tracts will be restored and/or enhanced to their fullest potential using grant funds. When appropriate, tracts will be transferred to the MN DNR as Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) or to the USFWS as Waterfowl Production Areas (WPA) and will be responsible for future management.

This proposal delivers numerous stateside conservation plan goals by protecting, restoring, and enhancing grasslands and wetlands in strategic areas. The MPCP specifically states that an ecosystem measure of success is stable or growing 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 serving as corridors allowing birds to maintain populations outside the core areas as well as move across the landscape. Additional benefits of this work is protection and restoration of the extensive wetland systems

encompassed by these tracts. Water storage sequestering and storing carbon, water quality, diversity of flora and fauna, and reducing erosion are among the many benefits of fully functional wetland systems.

Explain how the plan addresses habitat protection, restoration, and/or enhancement for fish, game & wildlife, including threatened or endangered species conservation

PF actively engages in conservation priority discussions with state and government agencies, to determine what areas are the highest priority for adding permanently protected lands in the prairie, prairie/forest transition, and metro planning areas. High priority is given to parcels whose restoration and protection benefit rare, threatened, & endangered species. Often the only locations where many threatened and endangered species are found is on existing habitat complexes. This proposal builds upon those complexes allowing for expansion and increased populations of those species.

When selecting projects for this proposal, PF uses the latest GIS data and works with DNR and USFWS staff to identify locations that benefit species of greatest conservation need. Additionally, species of greatest conservation need are considered and can influence restoration plans after the land is permanently protected. By increasing the amount, functionality, and productivity of grassland landscapes for these species, we aim to slow population decline.

What are the elements of this plan that are critical from a timing perspective?

Prairie chickens exhibit high sight fidelity, returning to the same leks (booming grounds) in the spring to perform courtship displays and nesting in the same areas on an annual basis. This characteristic makes prairie chickens extremely sensitive to habitat loss. The ability to purchase critical tracts as they become available is imperative to the success of this species as it is more difficult to establish breeding areas than it is to maintain them.

Describe how the plan expands habitat corridors or complexes and/or addresses habitat fragmentation:

As this proposal is fully integrated into the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan (MPCP), its focus is on acquisition and restoration in and around core habitat and corridors. Selection of tracts include proximity to known prairie chicken habitat, leks, and presence of other rare features identified by the MN County Biological Survey. Presence of prairie chickens are highly correlated with large expanses of grassland, which are most often large complexes made up of WMA's and WPA's. For this reason, many of the tracts selected build on these large complexes. In protecting and restoring large portions of habitat, we reduce both habitat fragmentation and reduce the cost of future management.

Which top 2 Conservation Plans referenced in MS97A.056, subd. 3a are most applicable to this project?

Grassland Conservation Plan for Prairie Grouse

Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan

Explain how this plan will uniquely address habitat resilience to climate change and its anticipated effects on game, fish & wildlife species utilizing the protected or restored/enhanced habitat this proposal targets.

Healthy ecosystems with diverse native plant communities and fully functional hydrologic systems are more resilient to the changing climate. Native plant communities not only convert CO2, but also outcompete invasive

species that reduce the tracts value to wildlife. Restored or enhanced wetlands optimize groundwater recharge, nitrogen and carbon cycling, and constantly provide water for local game, fish, and wildlife species. By protecting, restoring, and enhancing targeted tracts we're creating habitats that are both resilient to climate change and require less maintenance due to their self-regulating nature.

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this program?

Forest / Prairie Transition

Protect, restore, and enhance habitat for waterfowl, upland birds, and species of greatest conservation need

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".*

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.

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	State of MN/Federal	Monitoring	Maintainance	Habitat Management

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.

Will insecticides or fungicides (including neonicotinoid and fungicide treated seed) be used within any activities of this program either in the process of restoration or use as food plots?
No

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?
2-3

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
Restoration complete	6/30/2028
Close on tracts	1/1/2028
Purchase agreements	9/1/2025
Contract appraisals ordered	4/1/2025
Re-evaluate tract priorities	2/15/2025
Purchase agreements	2/1/2025
Contract appraisals ordered	9/1/2024
Identify priority acquisitions	7/1/2024

Date of Final Report Submission: 06/30/2032

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 for fee title acquisition of land 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, 2028;
(2) money appropriated for restoring and enhancing land acquired with an appropriation in this section is available for four years after the acquisition date with a maximum end date of June 30, 2032;
(3) money appropriated for restoring or enhancing other land is available until June 30, 2029;
(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	$110,000	-	-	$110,000
Contracts	$586,800	-	-	$586,800
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	$117,600	-	-	$117,600
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	$2,726,700	$307,700	PF, Local and Federal	$3,034,400
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	$1,300	-	-	$1,300
Professional Services	$86,200	-	-	$86,200
Direct Support Services	$22,500	$13,800	PF	$36,300
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	$18,000	-	-	$18,000
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	$114,900	-	-	$114,900
DNR IDP	$10,000	-	-	$10,000
Grand Total	**$3,794,000**	**$321,500**	**-**	**$4,115,500**

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
PF FIELD STAFF	0.25	5.0	$93,200	-	-	$93,200
PF GRANT STAFF	0.04	5.0	$16,800	-	-	$16,800

Amount of Request: $3,794,000
Amount of Leverage: $321,500
Leverage as a percent of the Request: 8.47%
DSS + Personnel: $132,500
As a % of the total request: 3.49%
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.

Detail leverage sources 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 70% 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 $12,300 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.

Professional Services

What is included in the Professional Services line?

Appraisals

Surveys

Title Insurance and Legal Fees

Fee Acquisition

What is the anticipated number of fee title acquisition transactions?
2-3

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?
7/1/2026

Output Tables

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	-	12	-	-	12
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	27	-	-	27
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	547	-	-	547
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**-**	**586**	**-**	**-**	**586**

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	$12,200	-	-	$12,200
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	$117,600	-	-	$117,600
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	$3,664,200	-	-	$3,664,200
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**-**	**$3,794,000**	**-**	**-**	**$3,794,000**

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	-	-	-	12	-	12
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	0	-	27	-	27
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	0	-	547	-	547
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**-**	**0**	**-**	**586**	**-**	**586**

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	$12,200	-	$12,200
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	$117,600	-	$117,600
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	$3,664,200	-	$3,664,200
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**-**	**-**	**-**	**$3,794,000**	**-**	**$3,794,000**

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	$1,016	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	$4,355	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	$6,698	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	-	-	$1,016	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	$4,355	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	$6,698	-
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.

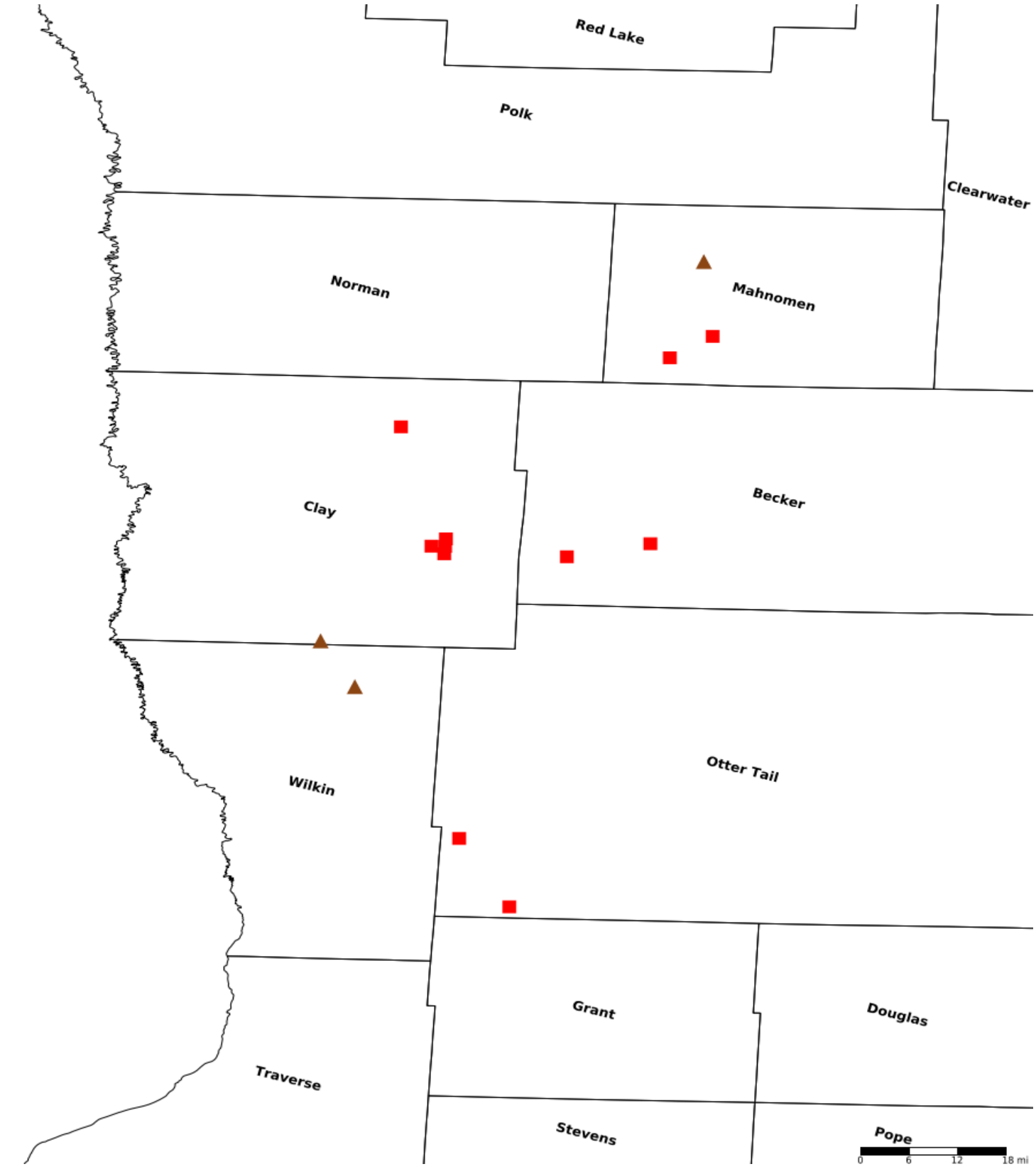
Fee Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Audobon WPA Addn	Becker	13942222	198	$594,000	No
Erickson WPA Addn	Becker	13943234	53	$175,000	No
Doran Lake WPA Addn	Clay	13944231	93	$240,000	No
Doran Lake WPA Addn	Clay	13945225	93	$425,000	No
Doran Lake WPA Addn	Clay	13944230	74	$270,100	No
Haymakers WMA	Clay	13746234	29	$1,366,000	No
Nelson Lake WPA Addn	Clay	13944219	140	$650,000	No
Haggman WPA Addn	Mahnomen	14441232	939	$3,286,500	Yes
Moore Lake WPA Addn	Mahnomen	14342214	710	$2,485,000	No
Wambach WMA Addn	Mahnomen	14541207	80	$280,000	No
Ridgeway WPA	Otter Tail	13244208	313	$2,000,000	No

Fee Parcels with Buildings

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Buildings	Value of Buildings
Flickertail WPA Addn	Clay	14145203	980	$4,300,000	No	4	$0
Dahler Slough WPA Addn	Otter Tail	13144225	100	$500,000	No	2	$0
Atherton WMA Addn	Wilkin	13646236	323	$1,700,000	No	3	$0

Parcel Map



- Protect in Easement
- Protect in Fee with PILT
- Protect in Fee W/O PILT
- Restore
- Enhance
- Other