Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Wetland Habitat Protection and Restoration Program - Phase 9

Laws of Minnesota 2024 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 04/08/2026

Project Title: Wetland Habitat Protection and Restoration Program - Phase 9

Funds Recommended: $2,128,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2024, Ch. 106, Art. 1, Sec. 2, Subd. 4(g)

Appropriation Language: $2,128,000 the second year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Minnesota Land Trust to restore and enhance prairie, wetland, and other habitat on permanently protected conservation easements in high-priority wetland habitat complexes within the prairie, forest/prairie transition, and forest ecoregions.

Manager Information

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Location Information

County Location(s): Otter Tail, Big Stone, Pope, Swift, Stevens, Kandiyohi, Todd, Douglas and Grant.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Forest / Prairie Transition

Prairie

Northern Forest

Activity types:

Restore

Enhance

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Wetlands

Prairie

Forest

Habitat

Narrative

Abstract

The Wetland Habitat Protection and Restoration Program implements conservation of high priority wetland habitat complexes within Minnesota's Prairie, Forest-Prairie Transition and Northern Forest areas. Phase 9 of the Wetlands Program will focus on restoration and enhancement of 983 acres of high priority wetlands and associated prairies to benefit important waterfowl and SGCN populations. Restoration and enhancement work will be managed by the Minnesota Land Trust, in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. All restorations are on private lands permanently protected through conservation easements held by the USFWS and the Land Trust.

Design and Scope of Work

Wetlands and shallow lakes provide the essential backbone for the survival of waterfowl and other important wildlife species. In fact, more than 50% of Minnesota's Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) use wetlands during their life cycle. Most of the plans developed to protect Minnesota's wildlife—including Minnesota's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy, the Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan, and the Long Range Duck Recovery Plan—cite the protection and restoration of the state's remaining wetlands as one of the top priorities to achieve the State's conservation goals.

Minnesota Land Trust's Wetland Habitat Protection and Restoration Program area extends from Meeker County northwest to Becker County, located along a vast glacial moraine system in western Minnesota. This prairie pothole country is the core of Minnesota's "duck factory" and is central to one of North America's most important flyways for migratory waterfowl. To date, the Land Trust has procured 39 conservation easements protecting 5,785 acres of habitat and 57.5 miles of shoreline, and has 4,350 acres of restoration/enhancement complete or underway.

Phase 9 will add to these accomplishments by restoring or enhancing 983 acres of important prairie and wetland habitats on permanently protected private lands in partnership with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. The Land Trust and USFWS will also work with landowners to develop additional shovel ready R/E projects. The Land Trust will continue to implement our criteria-based ranking system and market-based approach for purchasing conservation easements. However, unlike all previous phases, the Land Trust is not requesting easement acquisition funding in this Phase in order to continue to fulfill Accomplishment Plan Outputs for previous phases recommended by LSOHC.

The Prairie Plan and other data sets/plans were used to focus and shape our Wetlands Program plan and identify important wetland complexes in this landscape based on the nexus of high-quality habitat, existing protected areas and restorable agricultural lands. These complexes include a mosaic of wetland, prairie/grassland, and forest habitats, and agricultural land. Outcomes from this project include: 1) healthy wetland habitat complexes and associated populations of waterfowl, upland birds, and SGCN; 2) improved water quality; 3) increased participation of private landowners in habitat conservation projects; and 4) enhancement of prior public investments in wetland and upland habitat conservation.

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

Our Wetland Habitat Protection and Restoration Program addresses LSOHC priorities by protecting and restoring/enhancing wetland and grassland complexes that provide critical habitat for Minnesota's wildlife, especially its migratory waterfowl and prairie-pothole associated species.

Minnesota's wetlands are essential to our wildlife abundance, health and diversity. This project directly benefits SGCN and other important game and non-game wildlife species by restoring and enhancing their habitats degraded by detrimental agricultural practices, or imprudent land management. Our objective is to rebuild wetland habitat complexes that include a mosaic of wetlands, grasslands and woodlands. Priority projects may be near high or outstanding habitat as identified in Minnesota Biological Survey data or be located near other protected lands to help build larger habitat complexes comprised of both public and private lands. The vast majority of this landscape is in private ownership. For that reason, working with private owners is key to successful habitat conservation in this region. We also work closely with other conservation partners in the region to identify where coordination can make significant contributions to building large-scale habitat complexes.

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

The Land Trust and USFWS have been active in this landscape for more than 15 years and have successfully built a portfolio of protected lands within the Program area. However, we have a significant backlog of R/E needs related to the wetlands and grasslands that have been protected. There is an immediate need to provide quality habitat for SGCN and waterfowl whose populations are currently reduced. There is also a strong interest from landowners to engage in R/E activities as lakeshore and land development pressure increases in the region.

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

This program is focused on procuring easements and restoring prairie and wetland habitats on protected lands within priority complexes of wetlands and associated upland habitats, as guided by the State Wildlife Action Plan, Duck Plan and Prairie Plan. The R/E program serves to build upon past conservation investment in the program area, expand the footprint of quality habitat, facilitate the creation of habitat corridors, and reduce the potential for fragmentation. Minnesota Biological Survey data is cornerstone to our assessment of potential conservation project evaluations; we also conduct field visits to further identify and assess condition of habitat prior to project implementation because many private lands were remotely assessed by MBS. Project selection and development is based on the amount of existing habitat on the property, the potential for adding quality habitat and the project's context relative to nearby habitats.

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

Long Range Duck Recovery Plan

Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025

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.

The Minnesota Land Trust's restoration program uses a two-prong approach to addressing habitat resilience to climate change: 1) we prioritize projects that most support regional climate adaptation strategies such as improving migration corridors or habitat complexes, and 2) we include adaptive specifications in every project, such as using climate forward seed mixes and designing wetland features for future precipitation patterns.

Within the Wetlands Habitat Protection and Restoration Program increasing the number and distribution of wetland-prairie complexes within the flyway improves the habitat selection opportunities for waterfowl and SGCN species, resulting in an increase in the regional resilience to climate change. Climate forward seed mixes include enhanced proportions of plant species of the native plant communities that are expected to maintain or increase under future climate scenarios.

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this program?

Forest / Prairie Transition

Protect, enhance, and restore migratory habitat for waterfowl and related species, so as to increase migratory and breeding success

Northern Forest

Provide access to manage habitat on landlocked public properties or protect forest land from parcelization and fragmentation through fee acquisition, conservation or access easement

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 ~ *This program will restore/enhance 407 acres of wetlands and prairies in the forest-prairie transition region. Measure: Acres acres restored; acres enhanced.*

Programs in prairie region:

Remnant native prairies and wetlands are perpetually protected and adequately buffered ~ *This program will restore/enhance 576 acres of wetlands and prairies in the prairie region. Measure: Acres acres restored; acres enhanced.*

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.

Funding procured by MLT through the Outdoor Heritage Fund through this proposal will not supplant or substitute any previous funding from a non-Legacy fund used for the same purpose.

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

USFWS and MLT (as easement holders on respective properties) will work with landowners on an ongoing basis to provide habitat restoration plans, resources, and technical expertise to undertake restoration, enhancement, and ongoing management of these properties. The partnership between USFWS and MLT also includes the landowners we work with. The landowners who participate in this partnership have a landowner agree that states they must maintain the habitat restored. The level of dedication they have to their land makes what we do possible and propels our work far beyond each phase. We could not be successful without them.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Every 4-6 years	USFWS, Landowners, MLT	Prescribed fire, tree control, invasive species control	-	-

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

One of the Minnesota Land Trust's core public values is a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. We have been engaged in a year-long process to assess how the conservation community—and the Minnesota Land Trust in particular—can better address these issues. To date, we have demonstrated this commitment when possible given the funding parameters and our unique role in working with private landowners, including numerous projects to protect the camps and nature centers that serve a diversity of Minnesota youth and a long-term partnership with the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa on wild rice restoration. Going forward, we intend to build on this engagement by using diversity, equity, and inclusion as a lens in project, partner, and contractor selection. In each of our program areas, we intend to listen and seek out potential, authentic partnerships that can advance our goals of conserving the best of Minnesota's remaining habitats and, at the same time, being a more inclusive organization. One related program we are exploring is a new "Ambassador Lands Program" which would connect willing conservation landowners to diverse community groups that need access to land for a variety of programming purposes, such as youth mentor hunts, cultural or ceremonial use, conservation employment training, bird banding, and much more. This would add greatly to the more universal public benefits of conserved lands such as wildlife habitat, clean water, and climate mitigation. Finally, we welcome more conversations with the LSOHC and conservation community about how these values can be better manifest in all our shared work going forward.

Activity Details

Requirements

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

Will restoration and enhancement work follow best management practices including MS 84.973 Pollinator Habitat Program?
Yes

Is the restoration and enhancement activity on permanently protected land per 97A.056, Subd 13(f), tribal lands, and/or public waters per MS 103G.005, Subd. 15 or on lands to be acquired in this program?
Yes

Where does the activity take place?

Permanently Protected Conservation Easements

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:
Restoration/Enhancement:
Short-term use of agricultural crops is an accepted best practice for preparing a site for prairie restoration. For example, 1-2 rotations of soybeans could 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.

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

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Restoration and enhancement projects completed	June 30, 2028

Date of Final Report Submission: 11/01/2028

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	$434,000	$20,500	USFWS	$454,500
Contracts	$1,530,600	$30,000	USFWS	$1,560,600
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	$1,000,000	USFWS	$1,000,000
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	$7,000	-	-	$7,000
Professional Services	$5,000	-	-	$5,000
Direct Support Services	$117,000	-	-	$117,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	$1,000	-	-	$1,000
Supplies/Materials	$33,400	-	-	$33,400
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	**$2,128,000**	**$1,050,500**	**-**	**$3,178,500**

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
USFWS Restoration Staff	0.1	4.0	-	$20,500	USFWS	$20,500
MLT Restoration Staff	1.25	4.0	$434,000	-	-	$434,000

Amount of Request: $2,128,000
Amount of Leverage: $1,050,500
Leverage as a percent of the Request: 49.37%
DSS + Personnel: $551,000
As a % of the total request: 25.89%
Easement Stewardship: -
As a % of the Easement Acquisition: -

How will this program accommodate the reduced appropriation recommendation from the original proposed requested amount?
The number of R/E output acres was reduced proportionally (30%). Personnel and DSS were scaled, but moderately less than proportional. Some costs are fixed and must occur regardless of grant amount. Personnel/DSS were each reduced by 17%; Travel by 25% and Contracts by 39%.

Detail leverage sources and confirmation of funds:
USFWS will provide $1,000,000 in leverage in the form of newly acquired permanent conservation easements funded by the USFWS and the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, plus $50,500 of in-kind leverage for staff time, contracts and supplies for restoration and enhancement projects. All are confirmed.

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?
We will reduce the number of R/E projects to best meet scaling requirements. Output acres will be reduced moderately less than proportional as some activities are fixed and necessary for program success.

Describe how personnel and DSS expenses would be adjusted and if not proportionately reduced, why?
Personnel and DSS will be scaled, but moderately less than proportional. Some costs are fixed (landowner recruitment; grant management) and must occur regardless of grant amount. Projects can fail midstream after investment of time. Donation of easement value (high in this program) can inflate the number of projects pursued/completed.

Personnel

Has funding for these positions been requested in the past?
Yes

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?
Restoration and enhancement construction accounts for 100% of the contracts line amount.

Professional Services

What is included in the Professional Services line?

Design/Engineering

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
Land Trust staff regularly rents vehicles for grant-related purposes, which is a significant cost savings over use of personal vehicles.

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?
In a process that was approved by the DNR on March 17, 2017, Minnesota Land Trust determined our direct support services rate to include all of the allowable direct and necessary expenditures that are not captured in other line items in the budget, which is similar to the Land Trust's proposed federal indirect rate. We applied this DNR-approved rate only to personnel expenses to determine the total amount of direct support services requested through this grant.

Other Equipment/Tools

Give examples of the types of Equipment and Tools that will be purchased?
R/E tools and personal safety gear.

Federal Funds

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

Are the funds confirmed?
Yes

Is Confirmation Document attached?
Yes, on file

Cash : $30,000

In Kind : $20,500

Other : $1,000,000 USFWS easement acquisition (Migratory Bird Conservation Fund)

Output Tables

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	140	110	-	-	250
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	92	641	-	-	733
Total	**232**	**751**	**-**	**-**	**983**

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

Type	Native Prairie (acres)
Restore	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-
Protect in Easement	-
Enhance	114
Total	**114**

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	$303,100	$238,100	-	-	$541,200
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	$199,200	$1,387,600	-	-	$1,586,800
Total	**$502,300**	**$1,625,700**	**-**	**-**	**$2,128,000**

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	-	250	-	-	-	250
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	157	-	576	-	733
Total	**-**	**407**	**-**	**576**	**-**	**983**

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	$541,200	-	-	-	$541,200
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	$339,900	-	$1,246,900	-	$1,586,800
Total	**-**	**$881,100**	**-**	**$1,246,900**	**-**	**$2,128,000**

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	$2,165	$2,164	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-
Enhance	$2,165	$2,164	-	-

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	$2,164	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	$2,164	-	$2,164	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

0

Parcels

Parcel Information

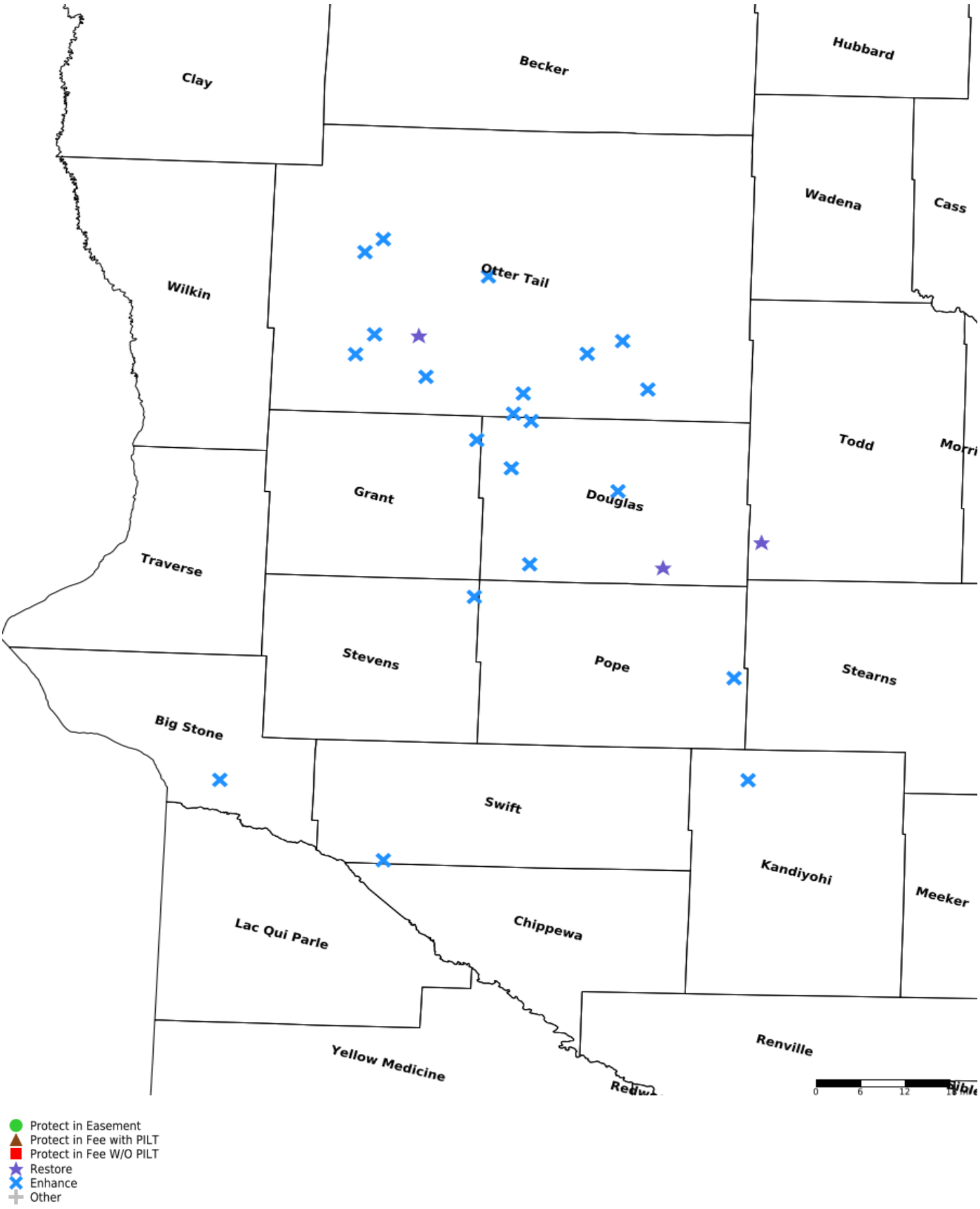
Sign-up Criteria?
No

Explain the process used to identify, prioritize, and select the parcels on your list:
Restoration and enhancement work will take place on private lands over which MLT and USFWS have secured permanent conservation easements to protect wetlands and associated upland habitat. The projects included in the parcel list were identified as priorities for restoration/enhancement by USFWS staff in their Morris and Fergus Falls offices and MLT staff.

Restore / Enhance Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Description
HOde	Big Stone	12145205	56	$21,000	Yes	Prairie
DSch	Douglas	12737221	10	$50,000	Yes	Wetland
ECoo	Douglas	12740224	80	$200,000	Yes	Prairie
ESpo	Douglas	12940210	50	$100,000	Yes	Prairie
KWil	Douglas	12938227	55	$200,000	Yes	Prairie
MSwePh2	Douglas	13040201	140	$250,000	Yes	Prairie
LChrJ	Grant	13041224	17	$51,000	Yes	Prairie
NEas	Kandiyohi	12235230	80	$24,500	Yes	Prairie
BPre	Otter Tail	13137207	20	$40,000	Yes	Prairie
DBor	Otter Tail	13242202	110	$200,000	Yes	Prairie
Folden Woods (Inspiration Point)	Otter Tail	13238203	30	$53,000	Yes	30 acres of prairie/wetlands to be enhanced
JMar	Otter Tail	13142201	10	$15,000	Yes	Wetland
KEvaFF	Otter Tail	13140214	160	$225,000	Yes	Priarie
KOle	Otter Tail	13239213	95	$150,000	Yes	Prairie
LLakT	Otter Tail	13443202	140	$350,000	Yes	Prairie
LRog	Otter Tail	13243222	38	$160,000	Yes	Wetland Enhancement
RKon	Otter Tail	13542230	54	$50,000	Yes	Wetland
TLakB	Otter Tail	13440219	28	$56,000	Yes	Prairie
Van Ellig	Otter Tail	13243201	1	$10,000	Yes	Wetland Enhancement
WEvaHPh2	Otter Tail	13140234	50	$75,000	Yes	Prairie
Json	Pope	12436211	52	$40,000	Yes	Wetland
Sark	Stevens	12641213	40	$25,100	Yes	Wetland
Nrby	Swift	12042232	21	$100,000	Yes	Prairie
OCom	Todd	12835232	140	$180,000	Yes	Wetland

Parcel Map


Clay
Becker
Hubbard
Wadena
Cass
Wilkin
Otter Tail
Todd
Morri
Grant
Douglas
Traverse
Stevens
Pope
Stearns
Big Stone
Swift
Kandiyohi
Meeker
Lac Qui Parle
Chippewa
Renville
Yellow Medicine
0
6
12
Protect in Easement
Protect in Fee with PILT
Protect in Fee W/O PILT
Restore
Enhance
Other