Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Lower Wild Rice River Corridor Habitat Restoration - Phase IV

Laws of Minnesota 2024 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 06/24/2026

Project Title: Lower Wild Rice River Corridor Habitat Restoration - Phase IV

Funds Recommended: $2,345,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2024, Ch. 106, Art. 1, Sec. 2, Subd. 5(k)

Appropriation Language: $2,345,000 the second year is to acquire land in permanent conservation easement and to restore river and related habitat in the Wild Rice River corridor. Of this amount, $30,000 is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with the Wild Rice Watershed District and $2,315,000 is to the Board of Water and Soil Resources. The Board of Water and Soil Resources may use up to $60,000 for establishing a monitoring and enforcement fund as approved in the accomplishment plan and subject to Minnesota Statutes, section 97A.056, subdivision 17. Subdivision 8, paragraph (b), does not apply to this project. A list of permanent conservation easements must be provided as part of the final report.

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Tara Jensen
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Location Information

County Location(s): Norman.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Prairie

Activity types:

Protect in Easement

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Wetlands

Prairie

Forest

Habitat

Narrative

Abstract

Channelization of the Lower Wild Rice River in the early 1900s converted 50 miles of sinuous river channel to 23 miles of straight channel and lost several thousand acres of wetland and grassland habitat within the river corridor. Through an established and successful partnership between the Wild Rice Watershed District and the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources, this 4th request for funding from LSHOC will permanently protect 420 acres of private lands in easements. This project represents a model approach to river corridor acquisition and is critical to advancing the largest river restoration project ever proposed in Minnesota.

Design and Scope of Work

Rivers and streams in the Red River Basin were straightened, ditched, cleared, and snagged to improve drainage. These activities destroyed hundreds of miles of aquatic habitat and eliminated thousands of acres of riparian forest, wetland and grassland. These habitat losses continue and have reduced fish and wildlife populations within channelized reaches.

The Red River Drainage Commission channelized the Lower Wild Rice River in the late 1800's with additional "improvements" completed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the 1950's. Channelized reaches of the Wild Rice River provide little functional aquatic or riparian corridor habitat and reduce connectivity between the lower 49 miles and upper 130 miles of the river. The project vision includes establishment of a ½-mile wide protected corridor along the river channel, setting back existing spoil banks, reconnecting oxbows, construction of a natural meandering river channel, and restoration of riparian wetland and prairie plant communities.
The Wild Rice Watershed District (WRWD) and the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) have approved a Memorandum of Understanding which details responsibilities for easement acquisition. The WRWD and BWSR partnership will use the Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) Program to secure, maintain, and monitor easements within the corridor.

The WRWD received three prior allocations from LSOHC for ML 2015, ML 2019, and ML 2020. Using these allocations, the WRWD and partners marketed the program to property owners within the designated corridor and successfully enrolled applicants. The Lower Wild Rice Program utilizes the RIM Outside Easement Program for establishing easement payment rates. The RIM easement payment rates are established using assessed values from the Minnesota Land Economics. Until recently, the most current available RIM easement payment rates were generated in September of 2018.

Unfortunately, inflation and other unforeseen market factors resulted in significant increases in the land values within the Wild Rice project area. As a result, several applicants to the program were unwilling to proceed with easement acquisitions at the 2018 RIM easement payment rates. Consequently, the WRWD will be releasing a portion of the unused funding from the prior allocations due to grant timeline expirations.

Fortunately, in March of 2023, BWSR released updated RIM easement payment rates. These new rates were significantly higher than the 2018 rates (40%±) in the project area and more accurately reflect current market conditions. Consequently, several prior applicants have shown a renewed interest in enrolling in the Lower Wild Rice Program. Therefore, this application to LSOHC is intended to fund approximately 420 acres from prior applications at the recent 2023 RIM easement payment rates.
Once all acquisition is complete, future channel rehabilitation phases of the project will be completed with the assistance of MN DNR and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). The WRWD will be the local sponsor responsible for final design, engineering, and construction of the project. The WRWD has requested Section 1135 assistance from the USACE to begin a feasibility evaluation of the channel restoration and setback levees alignment proposed in Phase 2 and Phase 3.

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

This project is the land acquisition phase of a long-term project that will restore 50 miles of river and over 6,500 acres of habitat for associated fish and wildlife communities. In addition to the direct habitat benefits within the project area, fish and wildlife populations downstream of the project will benefit through water quality improvements. The Wild Rice River and associated prairie and forest lowland habitats were identified as key habitats for species of greatest conservation need in the Red River Prairie ecoregion. Key among aquatic species is the Lake Sturgeon, a species of special concern. The Wild Rice River provides critical sturgeon habitat and is a primary reintroduction waterbody where Lake Sturgeon have been stocked. Restoration of Wild Rice River habitat will help ensure successful reestablishment of Lake Sturgeon populations in the Red River basin.

This project will also likely benefit mussel and insect populations in the Wild Rice River. Two species of caddisfly and two species of mussels, black sandshell and fluted-shell are listed as species of special concern and known to be present in the upstream reaches of the Wild Rice River. Acquisition and restoration of the stream and associated riparian wetlands will also improve habitat for gamefish and more than 50 other fish species present in other reaches of the Wild Rice River watershed.

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

Land acquisition is the critical first step in the restoration of over 6,500 acres of riparian habitat and converting 23 miles of ditch to over 50 miles of river channel. Once land acquisition is complete, Army Corps of Engineers will be approached to contribute much of the channel restoration implementation under the Section 1135 program. Currently, landowners along the corridor are very interested in implementing the proposed project. If funding for this corridor rehabilitation is not secured, the opportunity to rehabilitate this reach of the Wild Rice River Corridor will be lost due to the uncertainty of future land and crop prices and continued landowner interest.

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

Restoration of the Lower Wild Rice River Corridor is listed as a high priority project on the MN DNR state river restoration priority list. The Minnesota Prairie Plan also lists restoration of channelized prairie river segments of cultivated lands immediately adjacent to streams and ditches as critical challenges. One Minnesota County Biological Survey site of moderate biodiversity significance is located within the Lower Wild Rice River Corridor.

Reference stream reaches established by the MN DNR will be used to set the geometry of the restored stream channels.

Additionally, updated easement payment rates associated with this phase of the project will help minimize fragmentation of riparian lands that may have resulted had prior rates not been increased.

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

Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan

Red River of the North Fisheries Management 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.

This proposal addresses four priority actions for the Climate-Smart Natural and Working Lands goal of Minnesota's Climate Action Framework. (1) Accelerate forest, grassland and wetland restoration – Securing easements along the Wild Rice River is the first step towards restoration of riparian corridor that will include forest, grasslands, and wetlands. (2) Store more carbon – Restored riparian ecosystems are capable of storing large amounts of carbon (3) Restore and expand habitat complexes and corridors – The acquisition of easements along the Wild Rice River is explicitly designed to provide habitat complexes and corridors, and (4) Increase water storage and infiltration and manage drainage – Increased floodplain connectivity and setback of existing berms will increase storage and infiltration. Collectively, these actions will help restore and enhance priority habitat corridors, increase floodplain connectivity and future floodplain protection, and help mitigate impacts of climate change.

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this program?

Prairie

Protect, enhance, or restore existing wetland/upland complexes, or convert agricultural lands to new wetland/upland habitat complexes

Outcomes

Programs in prairie region:

Key core parcels are protected for fish, game and other wildlife ~ *The outcomes of the Lower Wild Rice River corridor project will be a stable stream with permanently protected and restored riparian corridor. This will significantly improve upland and aquatic habitat for fish and wildlife within the immediate corridor. Also, this project will improve water quality and provide substantial benefits extending to the entire watershed.*

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 funding request is not supplanting existing funding or a substitution for any previous funding.

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

Once a RIM easement is acquired, BWSR is responsible for monitoring and enforcement into perpetuity. The BWSR partners with local SWCDs to carry-out oversight, monitoring and inspection of its conservation easements. Easements are inspected for the first five consecutive years beginning in the year after the easement is recorded. Thereafter, on-site inspections are performed every three years and compliance checks are performed in the other

two years. SWCDs report to BWSR on each site inspection conducted and partners' staff document findings. A non-compliance procedure is implemented when potential violations or problems are identified.

Perpetual monitoring and enforcement costs have been included in the project budget. The budgetary numbers were based on using local SWCD staff for monitoring and landowner relations and existing enforcement authorities. The amount listed for Easement Stewardship cover costs of the SWCD regular monitoring, BWSR oversight, and any enforcement necessary.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2025 - Ongoing	Landowner Responsibility	Maintain compliance with easement terms	-	-
2025 - Ongoing	Stewardship Account	Inspection first 5 years; then every 3rd year	Corrective actions on any violations	Enforcement action taken by MN Attorney General Office

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

This program will focus on acquiring easements through the BWSR RIM Program on parcels targeted towards the future full corridor restoration of the Wild Rice River. This project has undergone extensive public engagement of landowners, stakeholder groups and permitting authorities. Multiple public hearings, informational meetings and opportunities for comment have taken place through watershed plans, project development, and preliminary design. These transparent processes allow for an inclusive process to provide comment and participate from all citizens.

In addition, the project is located in Norman County that is comprised of primarily low- and moderate-income households.

Activity Details

Requirements

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

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

Who will manage the easement?
BWSR - Once a RIM easement is acquired, BWSR is responsible for monitoring and enforcement into perpetuity. The BWSR partners with local SWCDs to carry-out oversight, monitoring and inspection of its conservation easements. Easements are inspected for the first five consecutive years beginning in the year after the easement is recorded. Thereafter, on-site inspections are performed every three years and compliance checks are performed in the other two years. SWCDs report to BWSR on each site inspection conducted and partners' staff document findings. A non-compliance procedure is implemented when potential violations or problems are identified.

Who will be the easement holder?
BWSR

What is the anticipated number of easements (range is fine) you plan to accomplish with this appropriation?
5-12

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:**
> In certain circumstances food plots for wildlife are an allowable use on RIM easements and must be part of an approved Conservation Plan. Food plots on narrow buffers, steep slopes and wet areas are not allowed. RIM policy limits food plots to 10% of the total easement area or 5 acres whichever is smaller. There is no cost share for establishment of food plots and upon termination the landowners must reestablish the vegetation as prescribed in the Conservation Plan at their own expense. Food plots are a rarely selected option by landowners, to date only approximately 2% of RIM easements have food plots.

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

Will the eased land be open for public use?
No

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 easement acquired parcels will be converted from cropland to permanent vegetated cover.

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
Obtain applications from eligible landowners	June 30, 2025
Restorations completed and final report submitted	June 30, 2027
Easements recorded	June 30, 2026
Allocation to specific parcels	July 30, 2025

Date of Final Report Submission: 06/30/2027

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.

Grand Totals Across All Partnerships

Item	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	$78,200	-	-	$78,200
Contracts	$15,000	-	-	$15,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	$2,189,300	$437,900	Wild Rice Watershed District, District funds	$2,627,200
Easement Stewardship	$60,000	-	-	$60,000
Travel	$1,000	-	-	$1,000
Professional Services	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	-	-	-	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	$1,000	-	-	$1,000
Supplies/Materials	$500	-	-	$500
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	**$2,345,000**	**$437,900**	**-**	**$2,782,900**

Partner: BWSR

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	$48,000	-	-	$48,000
Contracts	$15,000	-	-	$15,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	$2,189,300	-	Wild Rice Watershed District	$2,189,300
Easement Stewardship	$60,000	-	-	$60,000
Travel	$1,000	-	-	$1,000
Professional Services	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	-	-	-	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	$1,000	-	-	$1,000
Supplies/Materials	$500	-	-	$500
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	**$2,314,800**	**-**	**-**	**$2,314,800**

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Easements	0.1	-	$48,000	-	-	$48,000

Partner: WRWD

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	$30,200	-	-	$30,200
Contracts	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	$437,900	District funds	$437,900
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	-	-	-	-
Professional Services	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	-	-	-	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	**$30,200**	**$437,900**	**-**	**$468,100**

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Administration	-	-	$30,200	-	-	$30,200

Amount of Request: $2,345,000
Amount of Leverage: $437,900
Leverage as a percent of the Request: 18.67%
DSS + Personnel: $78,200
As a % of the total request: 3.33%
Easement Stewardship: $60,000
As a % of the Easement Acquisition: 2.74%

How will this program accommodate the reduced appropriation recommendation from the original proposed requested amount?
The number of acres of easements will be reduced from 850 to approximately 420 acres.

Detail leverage sources and confirmation of funds:

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 30 of the requested project funding was received, the acres protected would be reduced by

approximately 75% due to the higher percentage of administrative costs per acre to enrolll 255 acres in RIM vs the proposed 850 acres.

Describe how personnel and DSS expenses would be adjusted and if not proportionately reduced, why?
The personnel and DSS expenses would not be proportionately reduced, since there are certain management costs that are fixed regardless of the number of acres ultimately enrolled in RIM.

Personnel

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

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?
The $15,000 that is listed on the contracts line represents the allocation to the Norman Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) to provide assistance to the landowners for this project.

Easement Stewardship

What is the number of easements anticipated, cost per easement for stewardship, and explain how that amount is calculated?
This request assumes that 6 easements will be placed on land totally 420 acres. Perpetual monitoring and enforcement costs have been calculated at $10,000 per easement. This value is based on using local SWCD staff for monitoring and landowner relations and existing enforcement authorities. The amount listed for Easement Stewardship cover costs of the SWCD regular monitoring, BWSR oversight, and any enforcement necessary.

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
The travel line will only be used for traditional travel costs.

I understand and agree that lodging, meals, and mileage must comply with the current MMB Commissioner Plan:
Yes

Other Equipment/Tools

Give examples of the types of Equipment and Tools that will be purchased?
Equipment and tools will consist of standard hand tools and signage materials. Examples of necessary equipment and tools would be easement signs and steel posts to mark the easement boundary.

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	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	420	-	-	420
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**-**	**420**	**-**	**-**	**420**

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	$2,345,000	-	-	$2,345,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**-**	**$2,345,000**	**-**	**-**	**$2,345,000**

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	420	-	420
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**-**	**-**	**-**	**420**	**-**	**420**

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	$2,345,000	-	$2,345,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**-**	**-**	**-**	**$2,345,000**	**-**	**$2,345,000**

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	$5,583	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	$5,583	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

0.5

Parcels

Parcel Information

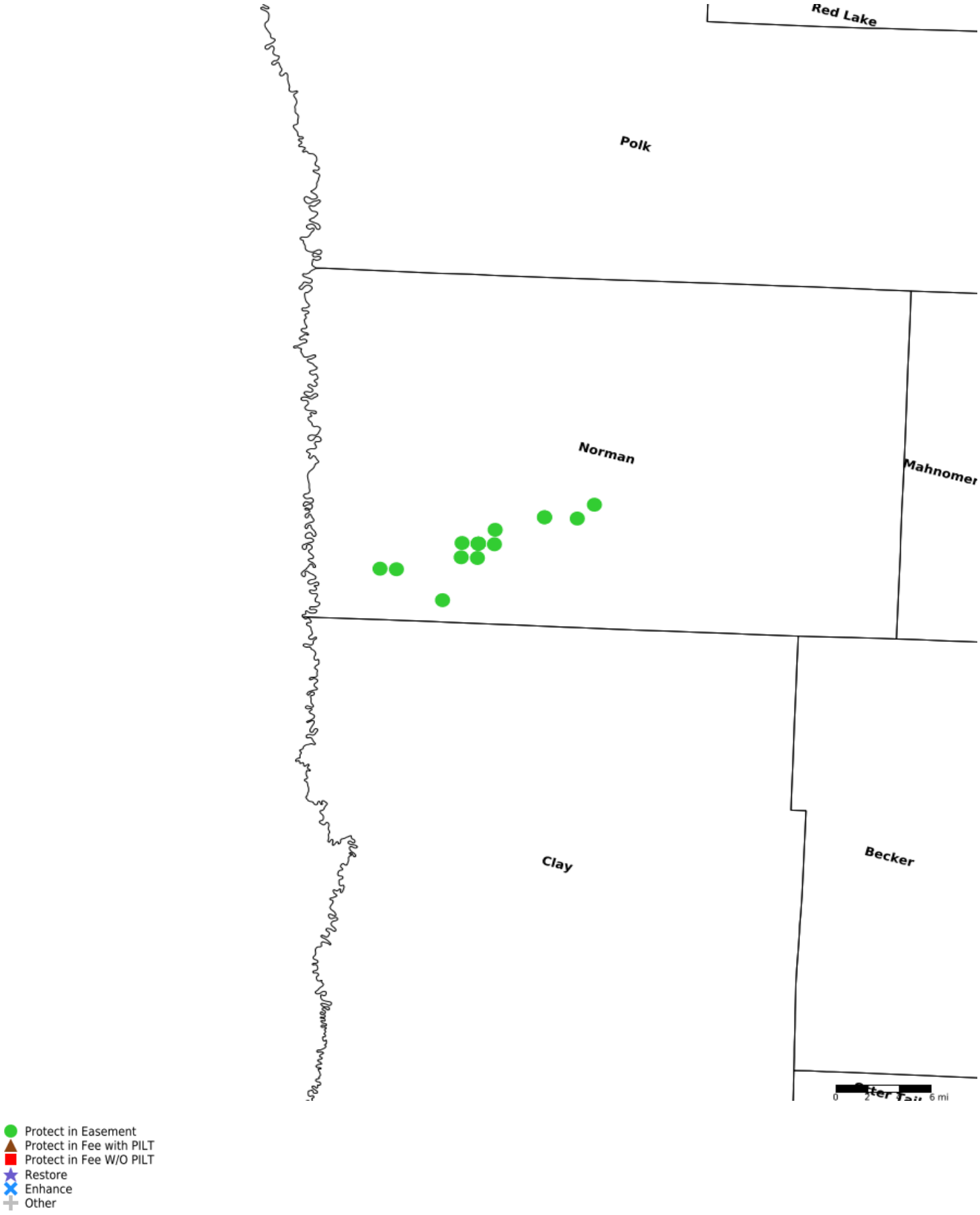
Sign-up Criteria?
No

Explain the process used to identify, prioritize, and select the parcels on your list:
The parcels listed include targeted parcels that the WRWD has already received applications for.

Easement Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
CAMERON C LEE TRUST (54-01-26-19)	Norman	14348214	16	$86,961	No
GILBERTSON/RYAN & JESSICA (54-04-25-19)	Norman	14446227	50	$252,212	No
HANS J PETERMANN TRUST DATED MAY 23, 2004 (54-05-25-19)	Norman	14447235	119	$622,935	No
HOFF/TERRY (54-02-25-19)	Norman	14348215	90	$344,058	No
JANE M PAVIA LIVING TRUST (54-04-24-19)	Norman	14446223	32	$141,115	No
LEE FAMILY, LLP	Norman	14347209	38	$232,371	No
LEE FAMILY, LLP	Norman	14347204	160	$982,283	No
LEE FAMILY, LLP	Norman	14347203	40	$245,571	No
LEE FAMILY, LLP	Norman	14347210	160	$982,283	No
LEE/LYNN ROWLAND/ REVOCABLE TR	Norman	14347203	120	$736,712	No
LEE/WAYNE & LYNN	Norman	14347203	58	$356,078	No
OLSON/MICHAEL & LAURA (54-02-24-19)	Norman	14446229	53	$242,738	No
OLSON/MICHAEL J. (54-01-24-19)	Norman	14347229	26	$88,936	No
PEPPEL/CAROL L (54-01-25-19)	Norman	14446229	10	$61,393	No
TUFTE/BRUCE, BLAIR & BRENT	Norman	14347202	157	$962,392	No
TUFTE/BRUCE, BLAIR & BRENT	Norman	14347203	73	$445,158	No

Parcel Map


Red Lake
Polk
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0
2
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Protect in Easement
Protect in Fee with PILT
Protect in Fee W/O PILT
Restore
Enhance
Other