Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Accelerating the Waterfowl Production Area Program - Phase XVI

ML 2024 Request for Funding

General Information

Date: 06/23/2023

Proposal Title: Accelerating the Waterfowl Production Area Program - Phase XVI

Funds Requested: $15,471,100

Confirmed Leverage Funds: -

Is this proposal Scalable?: Yes

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Sabin Adams
Title: MN Public Lands Manager
Organization: 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): Becker, Lac qui Parle, Clay, Kandiyohi, Otter Tail, Murray, Mahnomen, Pope, Wilkin, Nobles, Sibley, Swift and Meeker.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Prairie
- Metro / Urban

Activity types:

- Protect in Fee
- Restore

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Wetlands
- Prairie

Narrative

Abstract

In this phase of the Accelerating the Waterfowl Production Area program, Pheasants Forever (PF) seeks to permanently protect and restore parcels of land as Waterfowl Production Areas (WPAs) in the prairie, prairie forest transition, and metro regions of Minnesota. Acquired parcels will be either adjacent to or between existing public lands to create larger complexes or corridors for a variety of wildlife species. These properties will be restored to their greatest potential habitat possible with regard to time and budget constraints.

Design and Scope of Work

Loss and degradation of grasslands and wetlands pose a severe threat to the future of Minnesota's flora and fauna. Over 90% of wetland and 99% of grassland habitats have been converted to other uses, primarily those surrounding agricultural and urban development. This habitat loss significantly reduces wildlife populations abilities to increase or remain stable in the face of multiple stressors including climate change, pressure from invasive species, etc. This proposal works to slow habitat decline by acquiring and restoring previously converted wetland and grassland habitats into WPA's that are open to public recreation. This program continually builds on prior phases and augments current efforts by the United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) and their partners to increase waterfowl populations through the Small Wetlands Acquisition Program (SWAP). By improving wetland quality, quantity, and public access this program provides multiple benefits to Minnesotans.

Potential properties will be identified and evaluated based on landscape level planning tools such as the USFWS Duck Breeding Density Maps, MN DNR natural heritage data, and other state level conservation plans. Once purchased, all wetlands will be restored by either surface ditch "plugs," breaking sub-surface tile lines, or other best practices for wetland restoration. Restoration of grasslands will be completed using site-appropriate native grasses and forbs while following best management practices. Quality grassland restoration results typically take three to five years, allowing for one to two years of post-acquisition farming to allow residual herbicides to leave the soil. This timing allows us to address weed management issues, chemical carryover, and any other site-specific issues that may prevent the site from being restored to its fullest potential. Other restoration activities that may be needed include invasive tree removal, building site clean-up, prescribed fire, etc. as necessary to provide high-quality habitat. All restoration work will be completed to the highest possible standards with considerations towards budgets and grant timelines.

To address concerns related to county tax revenues due to acquiring public land, the UFWS and PF will notify counties prior to the acquisition of lands. Once acquired, the USFWS will make a one-time payment (Trust Fund payment) to the county where the property is located. In addition, the USFWS will make annual refuge revenue sharing payments for all fee lands within their respective counties.

Explain how the proposal 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. Restoration of wetland and grassland complexes will provide habitat for a myriad of species including waterfowl, black terns, bobolinks, meadowlarks, ring-necked pheasants, pollinators, and monarchs. Other species of concern benefiting from this project include the greater prairie chicken, short-eared owl, marsh hawk, and yellow rails.

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

These funds will not be available for use, from the time of writing this proposal, until July 2024. Because of this we cannot know what time sensitive projects we will pursue. Any potential seller in May 2023 will almost certainly have moved on by July 2024. Properties with incredible habitat value are coming on and off the market in weeks or months, not years. In order to seize these time sensitive opportunities it is critical that this funding be utilized in a programmatic way allowing older grant funds to be spent on the most appropriate and time sensitive opportunities. By the time funding for this proposed phase is available there will be incredibly important and time sensitive properties for sale and this funding will allow us to acquire those properties.

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

PF and the USFWS partner to identify and evaluate tracts to purchase. Tracts that are directly adjacent to existing complexes or contributing to corridors are ranked higher than stand-alone tracts. This phase will continue to evaluate tracts based on their ability to expand complexes and corridors as in the past, thus preventing future or reducing current habitat fragmentation.

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

- Long Range Duck Recovery Plan
- North American Waterfowl Management Plan

Explain how this proposal 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 proposal?

Forest / Prairie Transition

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

Metro / Urban

- Protect, enhance, and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests, and oak savanna with an emphasis on areas with high biological diversity

Prairie

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

Describe how this project/program will produce and demonstrate a significant and permanent conservation legacy and/or outcomes for fish, game, and wildlife, and if not permanent outcomes, why it is important to undertake at this time:

This program permanently protects and restores wetlands and grasslands as USFWS Waterfowl Production Areas. Parcels acquired through this program are vetted to ensure they will provide significant benefits to wildlife by building on complexes and providing public access for current and future generations.

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 ~ *Acquired parcels that increase the functionality of existing habitat will be restored to functioning wetlands with diverse upland prairie to serve as habitat for resident and migratory waterfowl and SGCN. Lands will be transferred to the USFWS as a WPA to provide accelerated wildlife habitat and public access, monitored by the USFWS. Protected and restored acres will be measured against goals outlined in each WMD Comprehensive Plan which rolls up to the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.*

Programs in metropolitan urbanizing region:

- Protected habitats will hold wetlands and shallow lakes open to public recreation and hunting ~ *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 resident and migratory waterfowl. Lands will be transferred to the USFWS as a WPA to provide accelerated wildlife habitat and public access, monitored by the USFWS. Protected and restored acres will be measured against goals outlined in each WMD Comprehensive Plan which rolls up to the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.*

Programs in prairie region:

- Protected, restored, and enhanced habitat for migratory and unique Minnesota species ~ *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 resident and migratory waterfowl. Lands will be transferred to the USFWS as a WPA to provide accelerated wildlife habitat and public access, monitored by the USFWS. Protected and restored acres will be measured against goals outlined in each WMD Comprehensive Plan which rolls up to the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.*

What other dedicated funds may collaborate with or contribute to this proposal?

- N/A

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 focused on accelerating the protection and restoration of strategically selected parcels.

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

Pheasants Forever will transfer tracts purchased with grant funds to the USFWS to be enrolled into the Waterfowl Production Area program. The USFWS will hold these tracts in perpetuity and will be responsible for maintaining restoration and enhancement work that was completed using grant funds. USFWS have an annual budget and staff that are devoted to implementing management on WPA's and NWR's. Management strategies to maintain healthy grasslands and nesting habitat include prescribed fire (using their internal burn program), biological, mechanical, and chemical treatments to inhibit encroachment of woody species. In addition to the biological benefit of increasing complex size or expanding corridors, selecting acquisitions in areas with existing USFWS ownership reduced management and administrative costs as a function of proximity.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Post Transfer	Federal	Monitoring	Maintenance	Habitat Management

Provide an assessment of how your program may celebrate cultural diversity or reach 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. This program spans all of the Prairie, Forest-Prairie, and Metro regions. 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 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:
At minimum we will notify local government in writing of the intent to acquire and donate lands to the USFWS and follow up with questions prior to 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:
A small number of parcels may have an existing federal or state easement on a portion of the tract which permanently protect wetlands or grasslands. In cases where parcels with these protections are deemed high-priority to our agency partners we will follow Outdoor Heritage Fund guidelines 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?
Yes

Explain what will be planted:
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.

Will neonicotinoid pesticide products be used within any activities of this proposal?
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:
All acquired lands 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?

- Federal

Land acquired in fee will be designated as a:

- WPA
- National Wildlife Refuge

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 that are current OPEN appropriations?
Yes

Approp Year	Funding Amount Received	Amount Spent to Date	Funding Remaining	% Spent to Date
2023	$5,231,000	-	-	-
2022	$5,537,000	$3,627,594	$1,909,406	65.52%
2021	$3,869,000	$2,775,919	$1,093,081	71.75%
2020	$3,658,000	$3,233,069	$424,931	88.38%
2019	$5,631,000	$5,280,605	$350,395	93.78%
2018	$5,061,000	$4,857,757	$203,243	95.98%
2017	$5,500,000	$5,471,847	$28,153	99.49%
Totals	$34,487,000	$25,246,791	$9,240,209	73.21%

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Identify priority acquisitions	7/1/2024
Contract appraisals ordered	9/1/2024
Purchase agreements	2/1/2025
Re-evaluate tract priority	2/15/2025
Contract appraisals ordered	4/1/2025
Purchase agreements	9/1/2025
Close on tracts	1/1/2028
Complete restoration	6/30/2028

Budget

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	$446,500	-	-	$446,500
Contracts	$1,905,000	$100,000	PF, Federal, Private	$2,005,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	$12,187,500	$5,200,000	PF, Federal, Private	$17,387,500
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	$7,500	-	-	$7,500
Professional Services	$450,000	-	-	$450,000
Direct Support Services	$79,600	$49,000	PF	$128,600
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	$20,000	-	-	$20,000
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	$375,000	-	-	$375,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	**$15,471,100**	**$5,349,000**	**-**	**$20,820,100**

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
PF GRANT STAFF	0.1	5.0	$40,900	-	-	$40,900
PF FIELD STAFF	1.08	5.0	$405,600	-	-	$405,600

Amount of Request: $15,471,100
Amount of Leverage: $5,349,000
Leverage as a percent of the Request: 34.57%
DSS + Personnel: $526,100
As a % of the total request: 3.4%
Easement Stewardship: -
As a % of the Easement Acquisition: -

Total Leverage (from above)	Amount Confirmed	% of Total Leverage	Amount Anticipated	% of Total Leverage
$5,349,000	-	0.0%	$5,349,000	100.0%

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 proposal 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 50% 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.

If the project received 30% 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

Please explain the overlap of past and future staffing and position levels previously received and how that is coordinated over multiple years?
In general PF staffing is existing and only partially funded by OHF and specifically this request. Billing to any appropriation would only be for time spent on direct and necessary costs incurred as outlined in an Accomplishment Plan.

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?
We anticipate that all of the contract funding will be used for restoration, enhancement, and initial development of the protected acres and $30,000 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

Professional Services

What is included in the Professional Services line?

- Appraisals
- Other : Acquisition Contractors hired by PF to obtain necessary documentation.
- Surveys
- Title Insurance and Legal Fees

Fee Acquisition

What is the anticipated number of fee title acquisition transactions?
15

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
na

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 4.04%. 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	-	30	0	0	30
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	187	1,688	0	0	1,875
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**187**	**1,718**	**0**	**0**	**1,905**

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	$30,000	-	-	$30,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	$1,544,100	$13,897,000	-	-	$15,441,100
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**$1,544,100**	**$13,927,000**	**-**	**-**	**$15,471,100**

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	-	-	0	30	0	30
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	0	-	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	187	563	0	1,125	0	1,875
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**187**	**563**	**0**	**1,155**	**0**	**1,905**

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	$30,000	-	$30,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	$1,544,100	$4,632,300	-	$9,264,700	-	$15,441,100
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**$1,544,100**	**$4,632,300**	**-**	**$9,294,700**	**-**	**$15,471,100**

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	$1,000	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	$8,257	$8,232	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	-	-	$1,000	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-

Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	$8,257	$8,227	-	$8,235	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Parcels

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. HAPET Duck Breeding Density Maps) available. Preference is given to project sites that help deliver the goals of other recognized conservation initiatives and plans. Data layers (i.e. MN Biological Survey, Natural Heritage Database, MN Prairie 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.

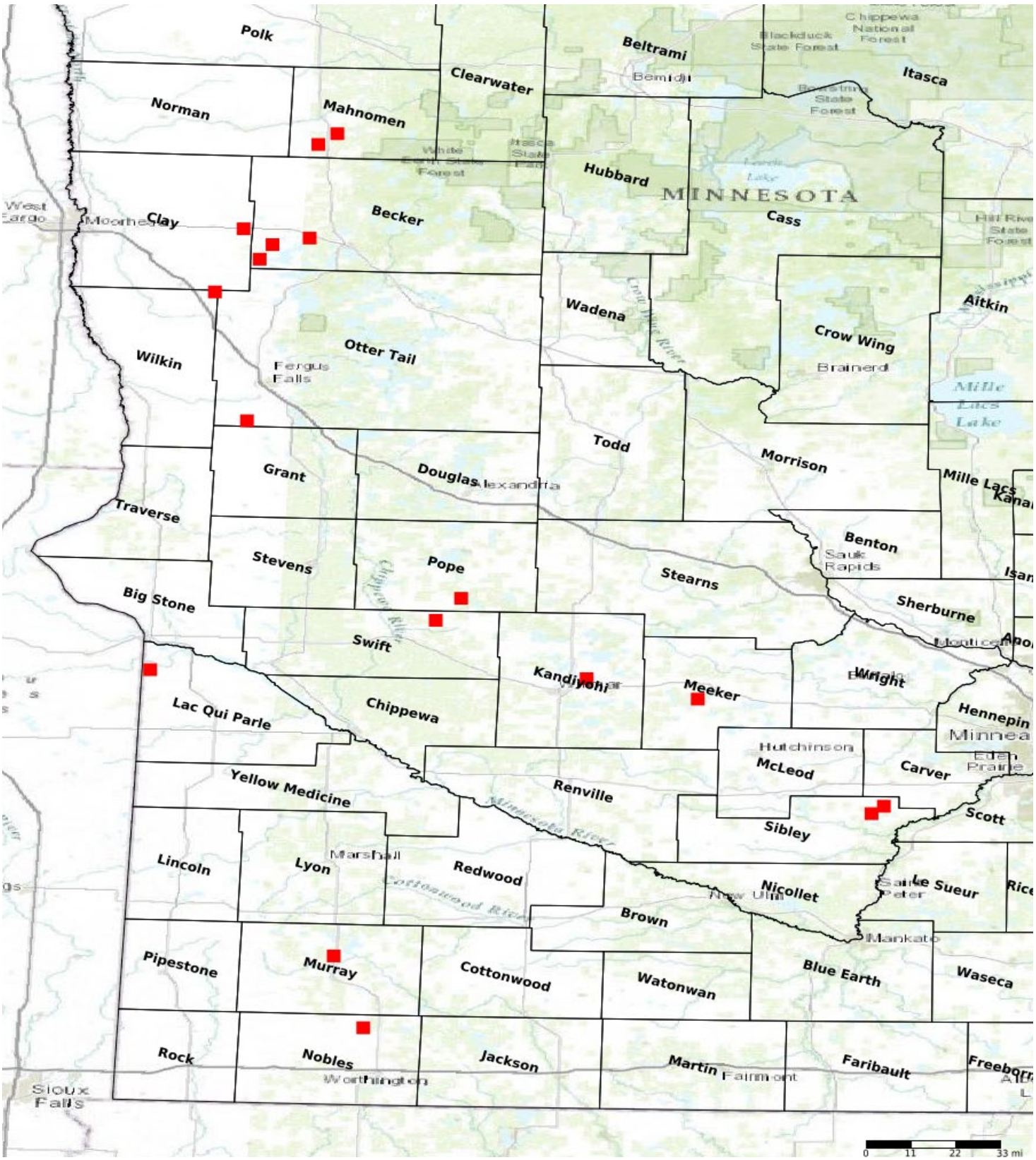
Protect Parcels

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
Bredeson Lake WPA Addn	Clay	13944211	120	$420,000	No
Bur Oak Lake WPA	Kandiyohi	12034233	194	$1,067,000	No
Beyer WPA Addn	Lac qui Parle	12046233	26	$40,000	No
Haggman WPA Addn	Mahnomen	14441232	939	$3,286,500	Yes
Moore Lake WPA Addn	Mahnomen	14342214	710	$2,485,000	No
Youngstrom Lake WPA	Meeker	11931228	131	$591,120	No
Lone Tree WMA Addition	Nobles	10440221	58	$640,000	No
Heidebrink WPA Addn	Pope	12338213	160	$720,000	No
Washington Lake WPA	Sibley	11426215	40	$98,200	No
Mud Lake WPA	Sibley	11426229	75	$447,000	No
Svor WPA Addn	Swift	12238217	150	$525,000	Yes

Protect Parcels with Buildings

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Buildings	Value of Buildings
Tub Lake WPA	Becker	13843220	322	$966,000	No	4	$50,000
Five Mile Corner WPA Addn	Murray	10741215	147	$1,697,000	No	3	$50,000
Dahler Slough WPA Addn	Otter Tail	13144225	100	$500,000	No	2	$0
Julsrud WPA Addn	Wilkin	13645201	77	$246,784	Yes	6	$0

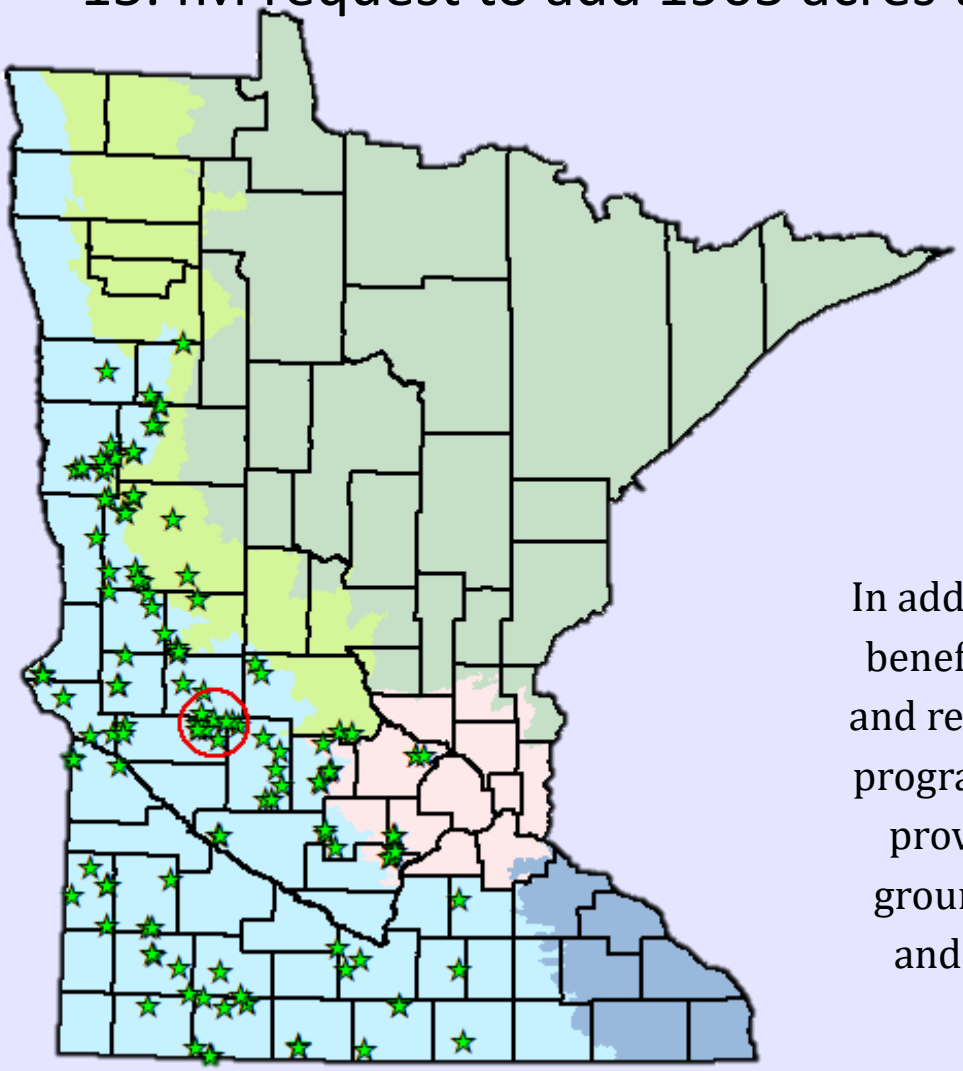
Parcel Map



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

Accelerating the Waterfowl Production Area Program

15.4M request to add 1905 acres to the WPA System



In addition to the wildlife benefits, lands acquired and restored through this program will provide improved water quality, groundwater recharge, and flood abatement benefits.

Protection through Phase 14 ML22

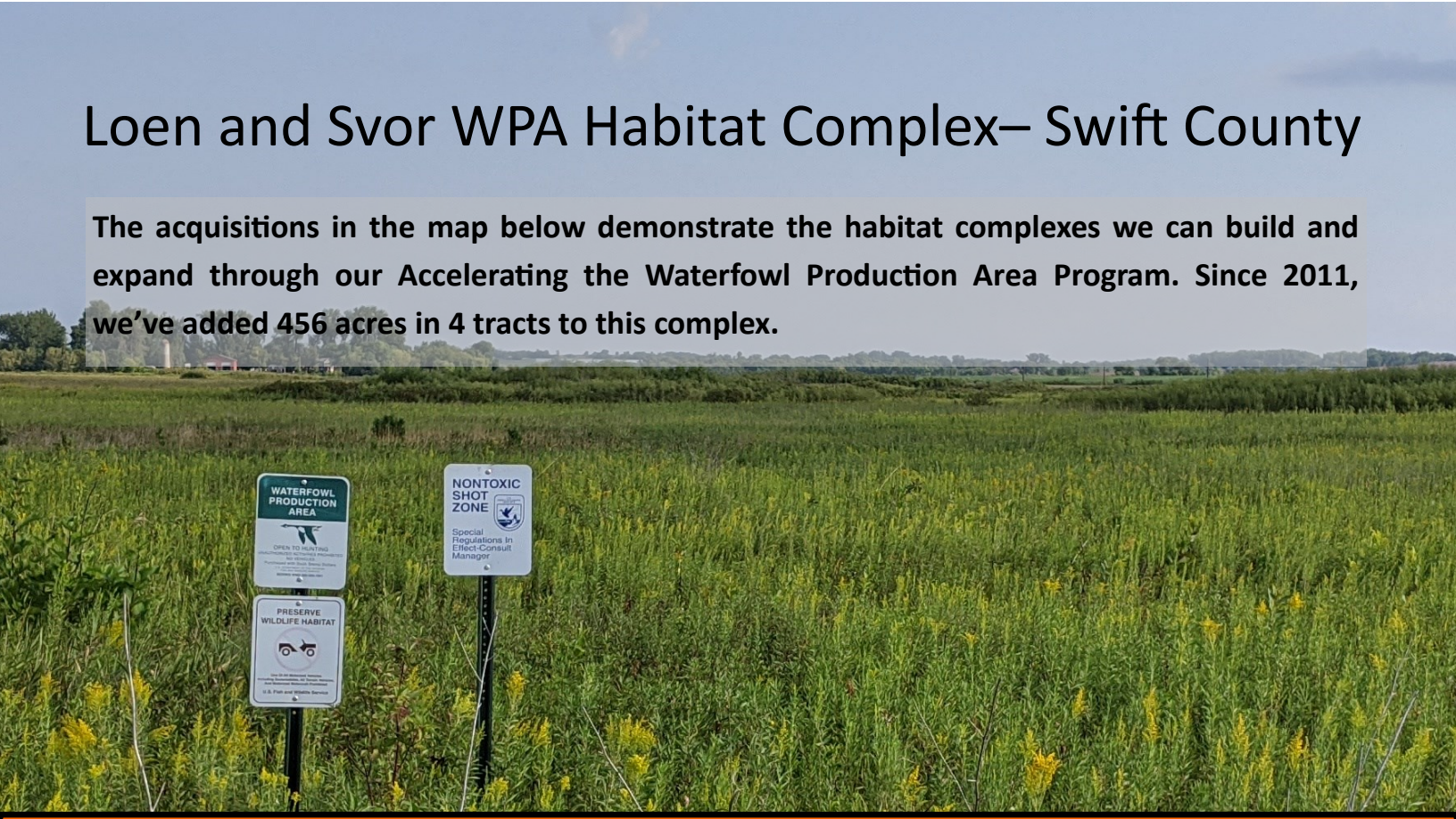
Acquisition activity for ML 21 & 22 are still ongoing.

133 parcels – 16,911 acres

$53,192,054- leverage

Loen and Svor WPA Habitat Complex– Swift County

The acquisitions in the map below demonstrate the habitat complexes we can build and expand through our Accelerating the Waterfowl Production Area Program. Since 2011, we've added 456 acres in 4 tracts to this complex.



This program also compliments the other work we are doing in the area, represented by the USFWS habitat conservation easement and the WMA addition via LCCMR funds. This habitat complex totals 4,625 acres of protected wildlife habitat. 2,140 acres of contiguous WPA's, an additional 996 acres of USFWS land (781 acres of WPA's & 215 acres of easement), 614 acres of WMA's, and 875 acres of RIM easements