



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Spring Road Conservation Project Laws of Minnesota 2025 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 06/05/2025

Project Title: Spring Road Conservation Project

Funds Recommended: \$1,982,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2025, Ch. 36, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd. 5(b)

Appropriation Language: \$1,982,000 the first year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with the Riley Purgatory Bluff Creek Watershed District to acquire priority wildlife habitat lands in fee in Hennepin County.

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Terry Jeffery

Title: Administrator

Organization: Riley Purgatory Bluff Creek Watershed District

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Location Information

County Location(s): Hennepin.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Metro / Urban

Activity types:

Protect in Fee

Restore

Enhance

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Forest

Prairie

Habitat

Wetlands

Narrative**Abstract**

This project will permanently protect 27 acres of dry prairie, wetland, woodland, and savanna in the bluff lands of the Minnesota River facing imminent risk of development via fee title acquisition of the property. The acquisition, restoration, and protection of this property is integral, as one of two remaining properties needed to provide a contiguous corridor from the Minnesota River to Lake Riley. The acquisition will also protect important habitat for a number of species of concern on the state or federal listings including Kitten-tail, Rhombic Evening Primrose, Gopher Snake, Lark Sparrow, et al.

Design and Scope of Work

The property, commonly referred to by the Riley Purgatory Bluff Creek Watershed District (RPBCWD) as the Spring Road properties or Noble Hills, is in Eden Prairie, MN in the Lower MN River Valley and in the Riley Creek Watershed. It is comprised of three distinct parcels that, in total, are 28.07 acres in size. There is a single-family home and three outbuildings on the property. Approximately 14 acres of the property has been used as a tree farm for ornamental evergreen trees. The remainder of the property is covered by mature hardwood forest or fallow land with native species present interspersed among the forage grasses such as smooth brome and panicum spp.

The adjoining land to the east and to the north shared similar topography and ecology but was developed to high density residential beginning in 2004. The properties to the south and to the west are maintained as passive recreation parkland/preserve and are owned and managed by the City of Eden Prairie. The Spring Road properties will provide the in-fill necessary to provide a contiguous corridor from the Minnesota River to Lake Riley, following the Riley Creek corridor.

The RPBCWD was first made aware of the development pressures facing this property in December of 2020 when Gonyea Homes applied for an application from the RPBCWD to develop 59 single-family detached homes. This development proposal would have disturbed 20.5 acres of the site and significantly altered the topography and ecology of the site. Gonyea Homes withdrew their application in the Spring of 2021 and Pulte Homes acquired development rights. Neighbors of the proposed development as well as advocates for the Fredrick-Miller Spring, located just off the southwest corner of the parcel, made their opposition known to the development at board meetings of the RPBCWD as well as at meetings of the Planning Commission and City Council for Eden Prairie, eventually filing a lawsuit under the MERA.

The RPBCWD Board of Managers began meeting in April of 2023 to discuss and negotiate acquisition of the property to provide permanent protection, restoration, scientific research, and public outreach and education initiatives.

The current RPBCWD Ten-Year Plan sets goals and action steps for the RPBCWD. The acquisition of this property aligns with five of the goals within the plan.

- 1) Protect, manage, and restore water quality of District lakes and creeks to maintain designated uses;
- 2) Preserve and enhance the quantity, as well as the function and value of District wetlands;
- 3) Preserve and enhance habitat important to fish, waterfowl, and other wildlife;
- 4) Protect and enhance the ecological function of District floodplains to minimize adverse impacts; and
- 5) Limit the impact of stormwater runoff on receiving waterbodies.

The Board of Managers for the RPBCWD passed a resolution in November of 2023, amending the Ten-Year Plan to include the acquisition and restoration of this property.

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

1. The MN DNR County Biological Survey (MBS) has identified Dry-prairie (sand-gravel subtype) on the property. This is an imperiled community that has seen the destruction of approximately 99% of the pre-settlement area.
2. MN DNR mapped a portion of the site as an MBS Site of High Biodiversity Significance and as a Regionally Significant Ecological Area.
3. The MN DNR Natural Heritage Database indicates that the threatened plant species, Kitten-tail is in the area. Kitten-tail was observed on the property in 2023 by ecologists hired by the developer. The Natural Heritage Database also lists Rhombic Evening Primrose, a special concern plant, in the area.
4. The MN DNR Natural Heritage Database indicates that the site has high potential for Rusty Patched Bumble Bee (federally endangered), Lark Sparrow (Minnesota Species of Special Concern), and Gopher Snake (Minnesota Species of Special Concern).
5. The site is tributary to Riley Creek and the Minnesota River, both of which are on the Minnesota impaired waters list. Development of the site will only exacerbate those impairments.
6. The property is located within the Lower Minnesota River Valley Important Bird Area (IBA), which provides essential habitat for breeding, wintering, and/or migrating bird species. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Birds of Conservation Concern observed at the adjacent Prairie Bluff Conservation Area include Cape May Warbler, Canada Warbler, Chimney Swift, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Field Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, and others. It's probable that the same species are utilizing the property. The property is located within the Lower Minnesota River Valley Conservation Focus Area identified in Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025. The Wildlife Action Network Score for the property is "Medium-High," indicating higher scores in the five metrics related to Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN).

The RPBCWD has already engaged Hennepin County Environmental Services to discuss partnering with the restoration of the property and retains Barr Engineering to provide additional ecological and engineering expertise. The RPBCWD has successfully restored 100's of acres of floodplain forest, wetlands, and buffer.

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

There is currently a permit from both the City of Eden Prairie as well as the RPBCWD to develop the property into 50 detached unit, single-family housing. The RPBCWD was able to forestall the development for five (5) years through the negotiation of a seller financed contract for deed while seeking a permanent funding. In the absence of this agreement, or upon its expiration, the fee title owner of the land will likely seek the most profitable disposal of the land which would be to a private developer. Nearly 100 acres of imperiled native plant communities have been forever converted to attached unit housing to the north and east of the subject property. The scarcity of these

ecosystems has become exceedingly rare in the Minnesota River Valley, especially within the seven-county metropolitan area, and, as with the sand-gravel dry prairie, throughout the state of Minnesota.

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

The acquisition of this property fills in one of the two remaining gaps to create a contiguous corridor from the Minnesota River to Lake Riley and protect the bluffs in the MN River Valley. This corridor has a myriad of different habitats ranging from maple-basswood forests to dry prairie, to savanna land, and numerous wetlands of various Cowardin classifications. The restoration of the property will address any invasive species or nuisance species and restore, depending upon ecological survey, to the pre 1865 communities to the extent practicable.

This site infills between two conservation areas to create 126 contiguous acres of preservation land and is separated from the Uprala Unit National Wildlife Refuge and the Minnesota River Floodplain only by Flying Cloud Drive. This corridor is identified in the MN DNR 2008 Regional Ecological Corridor Plan.

The property is located within an important migratory corridor for birds known as the Lower Minnesota River Valley Important Bird Area. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology has identified the City of Minneapolis as one of the top ten most dangerous cities for migrating birds. Protecting the property from development and restoring native vegetation will expand the habitat complex in the area that provides a safe haven for birds as they migrate through the metropolitan areas during spring and fall migration.

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

Minnesota DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda

Minnesota Sustainability Framework

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.

By maintaining the existing oak savanna, maple-basswood remnant woodland, and the riparian wetland, and restoring the degraded ecosystem we will re-establish the ecosystem functions declining precipitously throughout the metropolitan area - flood storage, carbon sequestration, pollinator habitat, and a decline in biodiversity. By keeping the area in a natural state, baseflows in Riley Creek by protecting the surface water-ground water interaction.

It is one of two remaining parcels needed for a fully protected, contiguous corridor between the MN River and Lake Riley. This property is within the Lower Minnesota River Valley Important Bird Area (IBA). The IBA regularly supports 50,000 waterfowl through spring and fall migration, as well as large numbers of migrating Neotropical migratory landbirds. Conservation of this tract will prevent conversion to hostile habitat for these species, providing food and habitat to the more than 100 species known to breed in this area and the migrating populations.

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this program?

Metro / Urban

Protect habitat corridors, with emphasis on the Minnesota, Mississippi, and St. Croix rivers (bluff to floodplain)

Outcomes

Programs in metropolitan urbanizing region:

A network of natural land and riparian habitats will connect corridors for wildlife and species in greatest conservation need ~ *The 2008 MN DNR Regional Ecological Corridor plan includes this property. The property is located within the Lower Minnesota River Valley Conservation Focus Area identified in Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025. The Wildlife Action Network Score for the property is "Medium-High," indicating higher scores in the five metrics related to Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). DNR has mapped as a "Regionally Significant Ecological Area" and an MBS site of High Biodiversity Significance. The property is located within the Lower Minnesota River Valley Important Bird Area.*

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.

Earnest money paid to the current property owner was funded through the RPBCWD levy authority. The RPBCWD had received a short-term bond as result of a lawsuit, the financial institute withdrew the bond.

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

As a special unit of government, the RPBCWD has levy authority and will use this funding source to continue ongoing maintenance of the restoration areas as well as scientific, educational, and public outreach programming.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2029-2040+	RPBCWD	Ongoing site maintenance	-	-
2028	RPBCWD, Natural Resources Opportunity Grant, MNDNR Conservation Partners Legacy	Continue site restoration and maintenance	-	-
2027	RPBCWD, Natural Resources Opportunity Grant, MNDNR Conservation Partners Legacy	Continue site restoration and maintenance	-	-
2026	RPBCWD, et al sources TBD	Develop architectural and civil plans for district facility	Solicit bids/quotes	Select contractor and begin construction
2026	RPBCWD, MNDNR Outdoor Recreation Grant, MNDNR Local Trail Connection Program	Layout nature trail connections to adjoining facilities.	develop and install signage and educational kiosks, etc	-

2026	RPBCWD, Natural Resources Opportunity Grant, MNDNR Conservation Partners Legacy	Continue site restoration and maintenance	-	-
2025	RPBCWD, NOAA Planet Stewards Grant	Engage potential partners in educational and public outreach programming	Develop E&O program specific to site	-
2025	RPBCWD	Retain architect firm specializing in sustainable/resilient building design	Begin plan development	-
2025	RPBCWD and Natural Resources Opportunity Grant (Henn Cnty)	Develop restoration plan	Solicit bids/quotes	Implement restoration plan
2025	LSOHC and RPBCWD Levy	Acquire fee title ownership of property	-	-
2024	RPBCWD Levy	Negotiate with owner	Provide Earnest Money	Enter into contract for deed

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

The RPBCWD already has an education and outreach program that can be leveraged to reach BIPOC communities as well as the financially disadvantaged. RPBCWD intends for the property to be a welcoming space for the entire community. We would intentionally reach out through direct mail, flyers, and representation at other community events to invite underserved communities to the property to enjoy the outdoors and special events. RPBCWD is interested in collaborating with local Native American tribe, communities of color, and/or immigrant communities to share cultural knowledge or traditions regarding the land, native plants, or other topics through presentations as well as permanent interpretive on-site facilities. There has been discussion about building a cultural and interpretive center onto the proposed RPBCWD facility if a partner can be identified such as the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community.

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)?**

Yes

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

Yes

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

Yes

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

No

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?

No

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?

No

Who will eventually own the fee title land?

Other : Special Unit of Government - Riley Purgatory Bluff Creek Watershed District

Land acquired in fee will be designated as a:

Other : Watershed District Owned

What is the anticipated number of closed acquisitions (range is fine) you plan to accomplish with this appropriation?

Are there currently trails or roads on any of the proposed acquisitions?

Yes

Describe the types of trails or roads and the allowable uses:

There is a driveway.

Will the trails or roads remain and uses continue to be allowed after OHF acquisition?

Yes

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?

This will continue to be the site access point. The district will maintain as they would any other infrastructure?

Will new trails or roads be developed or improved as a result of the OHF acquisition?

Yes

Describe the types of trails or roads and the allowable uses:

The RPBCWD (and partners pending) would like to install nature/interpretive trails to allow for public access to the site as well as for educational purposes. The materials are TBD but will likely consist of mowed trails or, depending upon erodibility, crushed limestone or wood chip.

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?

Maintenance will be the responsibility of the RPBCWD either through subcontractors or staff labor.

Will the acquired parcels be restored or enhanced within this appropriation?

Yes

Of the 27 acres being acquired, 24.5 will be restored or enhanced. The existing tree farm areas, currently dominated by brome grasses, will be restored to the appropriate ecotype. Those areas currently in a native condition, will be maintained to eliminate, or prevent introduction of non-native species. These areas include the wetland, the maple-basswood complex, and the oak savanna. We are working with Dan Shaw of BWSR and two graduate students from the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities on a restoration plan. We will also be working with Hennepin County Land and Water on design and implementation. This will be the second phase of the project after acquisition has occurred.

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
Begin restoration work	Spring 2026
Develop restoration plan	Fall 2025
Acquire fee title of property	September 2025
Update appraisal and assure comportment with DNR standards.	August 2025

Date of Final Report Submission: 10/21/2025

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, 2029;
- (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, 2033;
- (3) money appropriated for restoring or enhancing other land is available until June 30, 2030;
- (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	-	-	-	-
Contracts	-	\$30,000	General Levy	\$30,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$1,920,000	\$3,830,000	RPBCWD or Hennepin County Issued Bonds	\$5,750,000
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	-	-	-	-
Professional Services	\$62,000	\$138,000	General Levy	\$200,000
Direct Support Services	-	\$100,000	General Levy	\$100,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$1,982,000	\$4,098,000	-	\$6,080,000

Amount of Request: \$1,982,000

Amount of Leverage: \$4,098,000

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 206.76%

DSS + Personnel: -

As a % of the total request: 0.0%

Easement Stewardship: -

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: -

How will this program accommodate the reduced appropriation recommendation from the original proposed requested amount?

The RPBCWD will issue a larger bond.

Detail leverage sources and confirmation of funds:

MN Statutes 103D.901 grants watershed districts levy authority. MN Statutes 103D.905 grants watershed districts the authority to issue bonds. The RPBCWD will issue bonds to leverage funds and will use their levy authority to levy funds to service the bond debt.

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?

The RPBCWD would bond additional funds to offset the deficit and still acquire the entire property in fee title.

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

There are \$0 requested for personnel or DSS.

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?

Three properties will be acquired.

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	-	0	-	-	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	1	16	9	1	27
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	1	16	9	1	27

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

Type	Native Prairie (acres)
Restore	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	16
Protect in Easement	-
Enhance	-
Total	16

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	\$83,000	\$1,203,000	\$623,000	\$73,000	\$1,982,000
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	\$83,000	\$1,203,000	\$623,000	\$73,000	\$1,982,000

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	27	-	-	-	-	27
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	27	-	-	-	-	27

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	\$1,982,000	-	-	-	-	\$1,982,000
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	\$1,982,000	-	-	-	-	\$1,982,000

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	\$83,000	\$75,187	\$69,222	\$73,000
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-
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	\$73,407	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

310 feet

Parcels

Parcel Information

Sign-up Criteria?

No

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

There is no sign-up criteria. The property was selected because the opportunity arose through development pressure and citizen grass roots organizing.

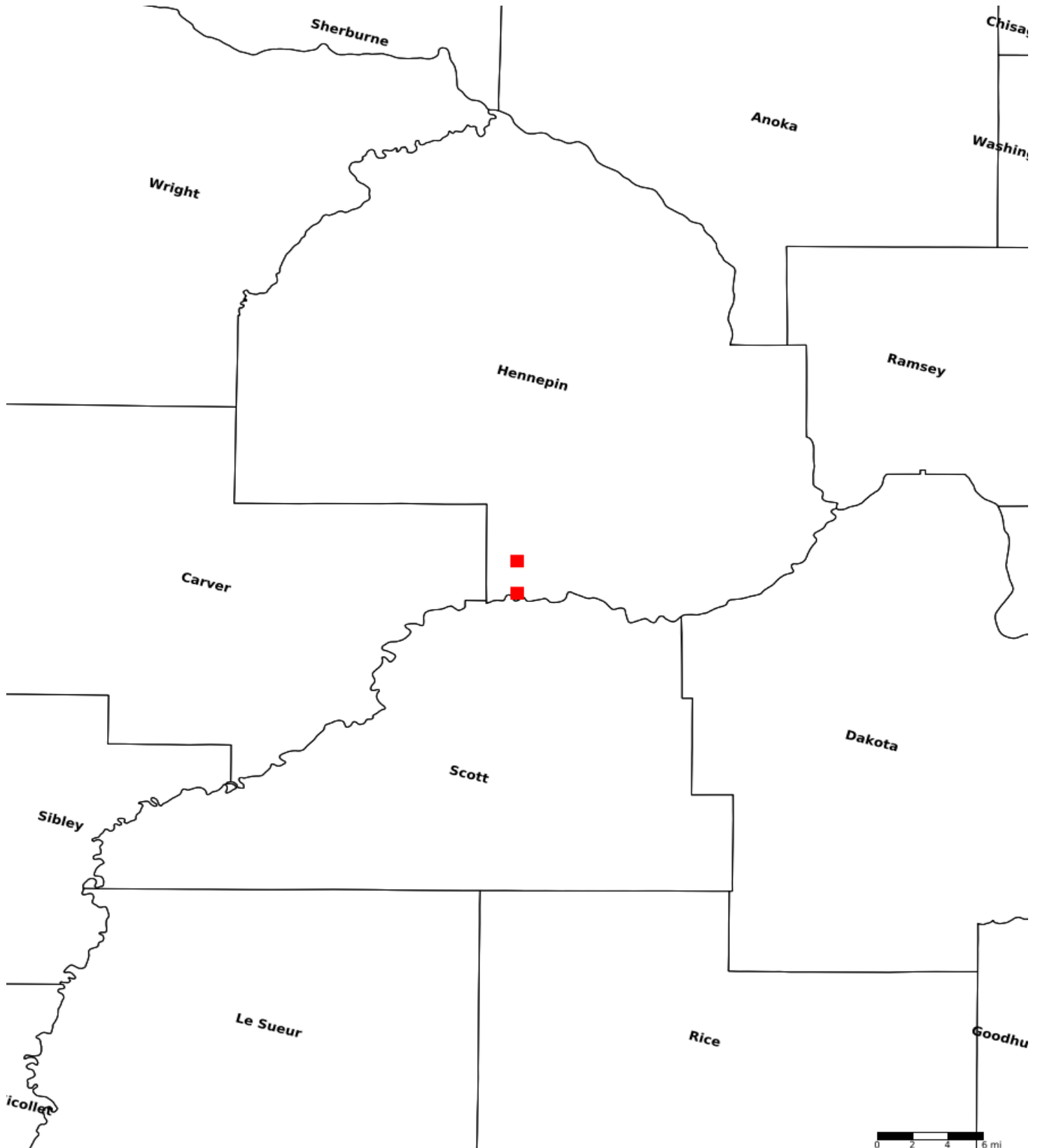
Fee Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
28-116-22-32-0001	Hennepin	11622132	3	\$641,667	No
28-116-22-32-0005	Hennepin	11622532	14	\$2,994,444	No

Fee Parcels with Buildings

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Buildings	Value of Buildings
28-116-22-32-0004	Hennepin	11622420	10	\$2,138,889	No	3	\$291,000

Parcel Map



- Protect in Easement
- ▲ Protect in Fee with PILT
- Protect in Fee W/O PILT
- ★ Restore
- ✕ Enhance
- ✚ Other