



## Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

### Shell Rock River Watershed Habitat Restoration Program - Phase XIV Laws of Minnesota 2025 Accomplishment Plan

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#### General Information

**Date:** 06/05/2025

**Project Title:** Shell Rock River Watershed Habitat Restoration Program - Phase XIV

**Funds Recommended:** \$2,141,000

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

**Appropriation Language:** \$2,141,000 the first year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with the Shell Rock River Watershed District to acquire land in fee and to restore and enhance habitat in the Shell Rock River watershed.

#### Manager Information

**Manager's Name:** Courtney Phillips

**Title:** Program and Project Manager

**Organization:** Shell Rock River Watershed District

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#### Location Information

**County Location(s):** Freeborn.

**Eco regions in which work will take place:**

Prairie

**Activity types:**

Protect in Fee

Enhance

Restore

**Priority resources addressed by activity:**

Habitat

**Narrative****Abstract**

The Shell Rock River Watershed District (SRRWD) is seeking funding for their Habitat Restoration Program to restore, enhance, and protect 407 acres of essential prairie upland, wetland and streambank habitat across the watershed. As a result, key biological functioning parcels will be permanently protected, streambank habitat will be enhanced, vegetation and feeding sources will be restored for migratory fowl habitat and wetlands and oak savannas will be restored. These projects are critical for the benefit of fish, waterfowl, and wildlife populations, reversing the trend of wetland loss and habitat degradation in the prairie ecoregion.

**Design and Scope of Work**

The SRRWD created the Habitat Restoration Program to restore, protect, and enhance degraded habitat conditions by implementing projects on a lake-shed basis. Specifically, Phase XIV will contribute to the District's goals by:

- Restore 112 acres of oak savanna landscape on Upper Twin Lake Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and Ann & Leo Donahue WMA by conducting buckthorn removal.
- Restore 20 acres of streambank habitat to improve floodplain connectivity, over-winter open water conditions, and to prevent further sedimentation into the watercourse.
- Acquire 9 acres from a willing landowner to expand an adjacent ICE Waterfowl Production Area (WPA).
- Habitat enhancement on a 34-acre site adjacent to Juglans Woods Aquatic Management Area (AMA). This is an abandoned gravel pit that is intended to be donated to the AMA as fishing ponds and surrounding upland prairie plantings, however, current conditions of the site are not safe for public use.
- Reestablish 152 acres of vegetation into upland prairie to improve pollinator species success with native plant diversity, targeting the Rusty Patched Bumble Bee.
- Restore 80 acres of wetland basins, reversing the trend of wetland loss and habitat degradation while improving nesting habitat and waterfowl food sources.

This proposal uses a programmatic approach to achieve protection, restoration, and enhancement of lakes, wetlands, streams, and native prairie landscapes. The program includes projects that are prioritized on the significance of the benefits to aquatic habitat, urgency of the work, availability of leveraged funds, location of projects, and agreements with relevant planning documents. All projects listed above have landowner support, who are eager to get funding. The SRRWD has a proven track record with the LSOHC in implementing projects that protect, restore and enhance natural resources. The SRRWD continues to receive strong support for these projects from landowners, local governments, and sporting organizations.

The program will also interconnect and reestablish important flyway habitats within Minnesota. Once completed, the program will establish waterfowl and fish populations, increase habitat for wetland dependent wildlife, and recreate the wildlife mecca in southern Minnesota. Finally, this program will preserve an outdoor legacy for Minnesotans to use and enjoy for generations.

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

When critical habitats are lost due to land use changes and other factors, restoring the habitat is imperative to the protection of species and their ecological processes. Important species are disappearing at an alarming rate and the SRRWD has an opportunity to protect their specific habitats. Many of the proposed projects are turning landscapes into multi-native species plantings that offer food, shelter, and breeding habitat for a wide array of species.

All restoration and enhancement projects will have vegetation management in low grounds that include bulrush, smartweed, and marsh milkweed species to provide habitat and food sources for migratory birds. Upland prairie mix will be established to promote pollinator success. Enhancement efforts of this large scale provide habitat for both spring and fall migration of waterfowl, overall increase the use days by migratory birds, and provide nesting habitat.

Using the Minnesota DNR Rare Species Guide, the SRRWD has identified species of importance for the oak savanna landscape. These species include the Loggerhead Shrike for birds, mussels such as the Round Pigtoe, and amphibians including the Blanding's Turtle.

Citing the Minnesota Wildlife Action Plan, Blanding's turtles suffer from low reproductive rates and high nest predation, exacerbated by habitat loss and degradation. The proposal area has a known hotspot for Blanding's turtles identified in the Wildlife Action Network. Projects like the wetland enhancements and streambank restorations provide the needed wetland and upland habitat to complete the Blanding's turtle life cycle.

The Loggerhead Shrike is listed as endangered and can be attributed to the loss of suitable shelterbelts and grasslands. With the projects identified, prairie creation and tree management on current grasslands can provide better habitat.

The Federally endangered Rusty Patched Bumble Bee has recently been documented on the Goose Creek WPA. Following the Implementation Guidance document developed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 152 acres of vegetation restoration will be conducted on the surrounding WPAs to better colony establishment and growth.

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

For acquisition projects, landowner willingness is a large factor in determining the urgency to be completed. Securing properties, while having a willing landowner, is imperative to its success. Landowners often get frustrated if funding isn't available when they want to sell. The acquisition in this proposal has an eager landowner who came to the District for first right to purchase.

For the restoration and enhancement projects, with the extent of wetland and streambank habitat loss in Minnesota, restoration efforts are an issue that need immediate attention. Science and resource-based planning has been utilized to strategically select projects that will advance restoration goals specified in the SRRWD's Restoration Program.

Projects selected in the program contribute to the success of long-term management plans. Key biological functioning parcels will be permanently protected, streambanks will be enhanced, there will be improved access to public lands, and vegetation will be restored.

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

This proposal is specifically requesting funds for the acquisition of 9 acres, known as the Ohm property, to expand the adjacent ICE WPA. The ICE WPA is a 253-acre site that was drained for farming. Over the years, conservation easements and acquisitions have secured lands to restore the native prairie. The Ohm property is currently an island of private ground surrounded by federal ownership. Acquiring this property will directly expand habitat corridors and the size of the WPA.

Additionally, 3 of the 6 proposed projects are located within a 3-mile radius of each other. This reduces habitat fragmentation and improves the overall habitat carrying capacity of the corridor.

For parcels that are not directly adjacent to current protected areas, the SRRWD utilizes precision conservation modeling with monitoring to identify Property Management Zones (PMZs) on a sub-watershed basis. The PMZs is a watershed wide parcel review where habitat areas were ranked on a 1 to 3 scale. This scale incorporated a variety of measures including size of the habitat complex to be protected, proximity to existing protection, and distance to a water source. Remaining parcels either ranked as a 1 or 2, which are high value locations. Implementing site specific habitat restorations projects are progressively improving populations of native fish, waterfowl and wildlife habitat to once again create a wildlife mecca.

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

Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Strategic Habitat Conservation Model

## **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.**

In many prairie plantings, five different species types including wildflowers, legumes, warm-season grasses, cool-season grasses and sedges/rushes are planted to mimic a native plant community. To address the anticipated warmer temperatures, hardy species resistant to pests and diseases, that can be found in southern regions, are selected. Doing so ensures that habitat needs such as nesting, shelter, and food sources, including pollen and seeds, will be available in changing climate conditions.

For streambank restorations, natural channel design that includes restoring a floodplain bench to accommodate higher flows reduces the likelihood of scour, severe undercutting, and erosion along streambanks and allows base flow to be maintained in a primary channel when water is low. By doing so, fish, mussel, and invertebrate habitats are more able to withstand extreme variability in water flow. Additionally, creating riffles and pools provides areas of refuge and maintains critical oxygen levels.

## **Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this program?**

### **Prairie**

Restore or enhance habitat on public lands

## Outcomes

### Programs in prairie region:

Remnant native prairies are part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and large and small wetlands ~ *Restored and enhanced parcels that include wetland restorations will be measured by the increased number of use days for migrating waterfowl as well as increased species biodiversity survey (pre and post restoration) that supports waterfowl. Upland prairie restorations will be monitored for increased usage, such as Pheasant Roadside surveys. Additionally, the number of prairie acres restored, and wetland acres created will be reported in the SRRWD's reporting framework. These measures will be evaluated against the Minnesota's Wildlife Management Area Acquisition – The Next 50 Years.*

### 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 request is not supplanting funding or substituting from any previous funding.

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

The SRRWD has multiple funding sources including a citizen driven local option sales tax, local levy, and multiple public and private funding sources to assist in the District's restoration efforts. Following this LSOHC appropriation timeline, the District will use their general fund dollars for maintenance implementations.

Additionally, the SRRWD is authorized by Minnesota state statute 103D and operates under a series of 10 year Water Management Plans that are approved by the Minnesota Board of Soil and Water Resources (BWSR). These plans include a comprehensive list detailing natural resource restoration, enhancement, along with protection and management strategies, that can be used for funding in the future for maintenance.

### Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2030+	Sales Tax	Maintenance Inspections	Maintenance Implementation	-
2026-2029	Sales Tax and LSOHC	Construction	Vegetation Maintenance	-

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

The SRRWD annually utilizes the Understanding Environmental Justice in Minnesota tool developed by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, to understand where BIPOC, diverse, and unserved communities are present in the planning area by using the socioeconomic indicators layers. Projects identified in this proposal are targeted to improve public lands that are located in, and used by, BIPOC and underserved communities. This tool is ran annually to help determine project locations, along with the Priority Management Zone mapping. The District will include the assessment outcomes in each of the project's operation and maintenance forms.

Additionally, the SRRWD has a digital option to view all completed work. Digital options give diverse community members an option to engage regardless of color, transportation, and gender.

## 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?**

Yes

**Where does the activity take place?**

WMA

Public Waters

AMA

WPA

### 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?**

Yes

**Describe any variation from the State of Minnesota regulations:**

Public waters are open to state fishing regulations. Private lands are currently not open to public hunting but will be once acquired and restored.

**Will the land be open for hunting and fishing after completion?**

Yes

**Describe any variation from the State of Minnesota regulations:**

All lands will follow state regulations.

**Who will eventually own the fee title land?**

Federal

**Land acquired in fee will be designated as a:**

WPA

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

One

**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

If funding allows, some restoration work will be completed.

**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
Conduct maintenance and monitoring of all restoration and habitat improvement projects.	Ongoing
Implement vegetation enhancement on restoration projects, complete final project construction.	July 2029
Finalize acquisitions and start seeding the sites for restoration.	May 2028
Begin restoration and enhancement projects during the 2026-2027 construction season following completion of design and permitting.	2026-2027 Construction Season
Begin project planning, design, and permitting work for restorations and enhancements. Complete survey and appraisals for acquisitions.	Late 2025-2026

**Date of Final Report Submission:** 06/30/2030

#### **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	\$45,000	-	-	\$45,000
Contracts	\$1,583,800	-	-	\$1,583,800
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$105,000	-	-	\$105,000
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	-	-	-	-
Professional Services	\$407,200	\$75,000	Local Option Sales Tax	\$482,200
Direct Support Services	-	-	-	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$2,141,000</b>	<b>\$75,000</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$2,216,000</b>

### Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Program Manager	0.43	5.0	\$30,000	-	-	\$30,000
Program Assistant	0.43	5.0	\$15,000	-	-	\$15,000

**Amount of Request:** \$2,141,000

**Amount of Leverage:** \$75,000

**Leverage as a percent of the Request:** 3.5%

**DSS + Personnel:** \$45,000

**As a % of the total request:** 2.1%

**Easement Stewardship:** -

**As a % of the Easement Acquisition:** -

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

Because of the reduced appropriation, one project had to be removed, and that was the in-lake habitat project for Edgewater and East Main Bay.

**Detail leverage sources and confirmation of funds:**

Leverage includes the SRRWD's Local Option Sales Tax

**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 District submits this proposal with the capability and intentions to complete all projects if fully funded. A 50% reduction would mean the in-lake habitat project would have to be removed, while all other projects would stay.

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

The District does not use DSS. The grant funded personnel costs would be reduced to \$45,000 but the in-kind staff dollar amounts would be moved from personnel to professional expenses, creating a near proportionate reduction.

**Personnel**

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

Yes

**Contracts**

**What is included in the contracts line?**

All the work in the contracts line is centered on restoration construction costs minus professional services and staff time.

**Professional Services**

**What is included in the Professional Services line?**

Appraisals

Design/Engineering

Surveys

Title Insurance and Legal Fees

**Fee Acquisition**

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

One

**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	-	-	-	172	172
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	9	9
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	226	226
<b>Total</b>	-	-	-	<b>407</b>	<b>407</b>

**Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)**

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	\$291,000	\$291,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	\$105,000	\$105,000
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	\$1,745,000	\$1,745,000
<b>Total</b>	-	-	-	<b>\$2,141,000</b>	<b>\$2,141,000</b>

**Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)**

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	-	-	-	172	-	172
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	9	-	9
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	226	-	226
<b>Total</b>	-	-	-	<b>407</b>	-	<b>407</b>

**Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)**

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	\$291,000	-	\$291,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	\$105,000	-	\$105,000
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	\$1,745,000	-	\$1,745,000
<b>Total</b>	-	-	-	<b>\$2,141,000</b>	-	<b>\$2,141,000</b>

**Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)**

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	-	-	\$1,691
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	\$11,666
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	\$7,721

**Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)**

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	-	-	\$1,691	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	\$11,666	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	\$7,721	-

**Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles**

18,910 feet

## Parcels

### Parcel Information

#### Sign-up Criteria?

No

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

Parcels are selected using the Property Management Zones (PMZs). The PMZs are identified using precision conservation modeling, along with monitoring, and science-based targeting. Parcels are then prioritized and ranked based on the degree of habitat degradation, restoration potential, and landowner interest and support. All parcels listed below have willing landowners ready to initiate the projects if funding allows.

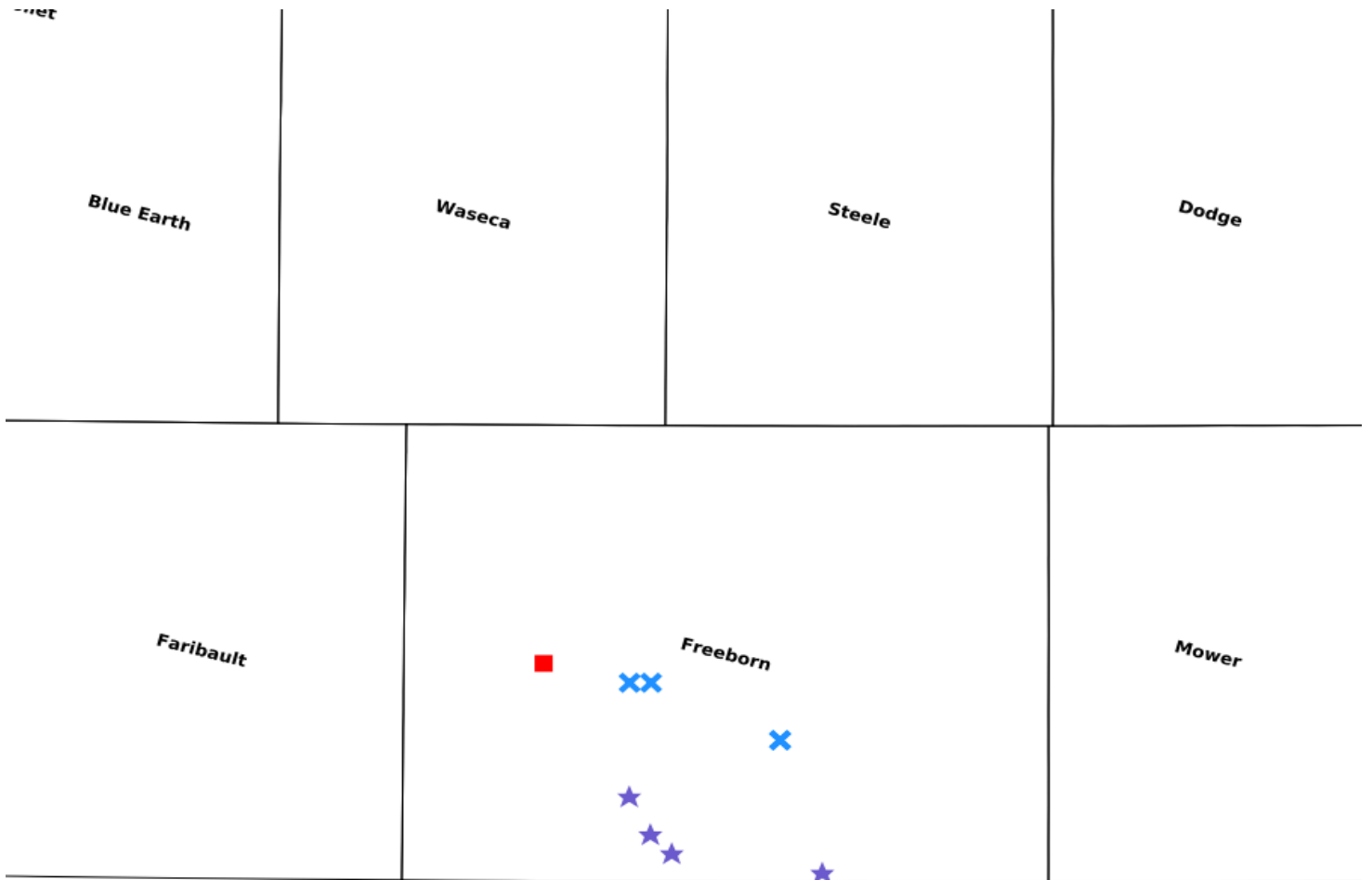
### Restore / Enhance Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Description
Bhagam WPA Restoration	Freeborn	10121230	10	\$30,000	Yes	Wetland restoration with dike installation and poison hemlock removal.
Goose Creek WPA Restoration	Freeborn	10122224	80	\$45,000	Yes	Tree and brush removal and oak savanna restoration by removal of undesirable woody species.
Juglans Habitat Enhancement	Freeborn	10221225	34	\$1,100,000	Yes	Enhancements of an abandoned gravel pit for habitat and fishponds to be donated to the adjacent AMA.
Juglans Woods AMA Wetland Enhancement	Freeborn	10221225	80	\$550,000	Yes	Wetland restoration and connection of river floodplain.
Oak Savanna Management	Freeborn	10222211	100	\$89,300	Yes	Ann & Leo Donahue oak savanna restoration through buckthorn removal.
Oak Savanna Mangement	Freeborn	10222212	12	\$10,700	Yes	Magaksica WMA oak savanna restoration through buckthorn removal.
Shell Rock River Streambank Restoration	Freeborn	10120232	20	\$150,000	Yes	Stabilize failed streambanks and incorporate habitat features such as toe wood.
Twin Lakes WPA Restoration	Freeborn	10122211	62	\$66,000	Yes	Oak savanna restoration through buckthorn removal and grassland management.

### Fee Parcels with Buildings

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Buildings	Value of Buildings
Ohm Property	Freeborn	10222206	9	\$105,500	No	3	\$0

Parcel Map



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

0 3 6 9 mi