



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge, Phase XV

ML 2025 Request for Funding

General Information

Date: 06/04/2024

Proposal Title: Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge, Phase XV

Funds Requested: \$8,982,300

Confirmed Leverage Funds: \$350,000

Is this proposal Scalable?: Yes

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Chris McGrath

Title: Habitat Protection Manager

Organization: The Nature Conservancy

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Location Information

County Location(s): Martin, Yellow Medicine, Traverse, Stevens, Swift, Wilkin, Roseau, Stearns, Rock, Renville, Red Lake, Redwood, Polk, Pope, Pennington, Pipestone, Otter Tail, Murray, Norman, Nobles, Nicollet, Mahnomon, Lyon, Marshall, Lincoln, Lac qui Parle, Kittson, Kandiyohi, Grant, Jackson, Clay, Cottonwood, Chippewa, Big Stone, Becker and Brown.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Prairie
- Forest / Prairie Transition

Activity types:

- Protect in Easement
- Protect in Fee

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Prairie

Narrative**Abstract**

The Nature Conservancy and US Fish and Wildlife Service will work together to permanently protect native prairie and associated complexes of wetlands and native habitats in western and central Minnesota by purchasing approximately 2,250 acres of fee title properties and/or permanent habitat easements. Approximately 1,400 acres will be native prairie. Work will be focused in priority areas identified in the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan that have significant biodiversity by the Minnesota Biological Survey.

Design and Scope of Work

The Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) was established in 2000 to address the loss of America's grasslands and the decline of grassland wildlife. The Refuge was created to permanently preserve and restore a portion of our disappearing tallgrass prairie. The Refuge is authorized to work in the prairie landscapes of western Minnesota and northwestern Iowa.

To date, the Refuge has protected more than 14,199 acres. Funding from the Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) will allow The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), working in partnership, to significantly accelerate this progress. TNC and USFWS will cooperate on protecting approximately 2,250 acres of native prairie and associated habitat in the 49 Minnesota counties within the Refuge boundary. We expect to protect approximately 2,100 acres with permanent habitat easements and approximately 150 acres in fee title.

This program's work is targeted at protecting high-quality native habitat in areas with existing concentrations of native prairie, wetlands, and protected lands. The lands protected will consist of native prairie and associated habitats including wetlands, streams, coulees, and lakes.

Potential acquisitions are reviewed using the following criteria:

- 1) Is there untitled native prairie on the tract? If not, is it adjacent to untitled native prairie?
- 2) Is the property in a priority area (core/corridor/complex) identified in the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan (Prairie Plan)?
- 3) Is it adjacent to an existing complex of protected land?
- 4) Was it identified by Minnesota Biological Survey (Biological Survey) or FWS biologists as having concentrations of threatened and endangered species and communities?
- 5) Is it suitable for public recreation?

Previous OHF support has allowed the partners to make significant progress towards our shared goal of protecting and buffering the remaining native prairie. The first property was acquired in March, 2013. Since then, approximately 8,578 acres have been added to the Refuge with OHF funding. Of these, approximately 5,258 acres (approximately 61%) are classified as untitled native prairie. Additional habitat includes approximately 691 acres of wetlands, 28 miles of stream front, and more than 2.5 miles of lakefront.

We have \$1,866,803 in signed conservation easement agreements with landowners for the protection of approximately 644 acres and are negotiating with landowners for an additional \$3,969,175 of conservation easements for the permanent protection of 1,534 acres. In total, there are \$5,835,978 of signed & negotiated conservation easements for the permanent protection of 2,178 acres. Resulting from the strong TNC & USFWS

partnership, our combined experience & expertise with this program, and the long list of interested landowners we're in contact with, we anticipate that this high level of demand for conservation easements will continue well into the future, including the active funding years of ML 2025's appropriation.

With the continued support from the Outdoor Heritage Fund, this program will continue to make lasting progress towards protecting Minnesota's native prairies and the wildlife that depend on those lands.

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

The NTP NWR program takes the approach that specific species are best protected by conserving high-quality habitat in the most critical prairie areas.

This focus on habitat quality has produced results. Of the 8,578 acres protected, approximately 50% have been identified as having significant biodiversity by the Biological Survey. These high-quality lands provide habitat for a wide range of species, from game species to those that are endangered, threatened, or in greatest conservation need.

Biological Survey field work has identified populations of 29 rare species located wholly or partially on NTP NWR properties protected with OHF-funding. Benefited species include:

Birds – Henslow's sparrow (endangered), Wilson's phalarope (threatened), greater prairie-chicken, marbled godwit, short-eared owl, bald eagle, and yellow rail
 Butterflies – Dakota skipper (endangered), Poweshiek skipperling (endangered), arogos skipper, Pawnee skipper, and regal fritillary
 Fish - Topeka shiner (endangered)
 Reptiles - Blanding's turtle (threatened)
 Plants – prairie bush clover (federally threatened), sterile sedge (threatened), hair-like beak rush (threatened), western white prairie clover, blanket flower, buffalo grass, few-flowered spikerush, Hall's sedge, least moonwort, Missouri milk-vetch, mudwort, prairie mimosa, slender milk-vetch, slender plantain, and small white lady's slipper.

Highlights over the past year included the protection of 752 grassland acres, including 506 acres of untilled native prairie, 60 acres of wetlands, 6.3 miles of stream frontage, much of which identified as critical habitat for the Topeka Shiner, a federally listed species, and other populations of federally listed species & Species in Greatest Conservation Need.

Future acquisition work will be guided by this same focus on high-quality, diverse habitat, benefiting a wide range of species. As we successfully continue with the program to protect the last remaining native prairie in MN, we are seeing climate resiliency benefits resulting from increased enhancement and restoration investments. To that end, this proposal includes an increase in requested funding for the enhancement and restoration of approximately 750 acres. This increase also takes into consideration the MN Department of Labor & Industry (DLI) prevailing wage requirements. As we continue to correspond with the DLI, we will inform the Council of changes made to the application of prevailing wage.

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

While native prairie once covered one-third of Minnesota, this habitat type has experienced steep declines in recent decades, and it is estimated that only approximately 1% of untilled prairie remains. Many of these remaining areas are small and geographically isolated from each other. Conversion of the few remaining native

prairie areas to cropland, sand and gravel mining, and residential development has been a consistent and real threat in many areas of the state. To protect these irreplaceable habitats, it is essential to either place them in public ownership through fee acquisition, which allows the public to enjoy the habitats for recreation or hunting/fishing, or to prevent the conversion of these habitats with permanent conservation easements.

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

In addition to an evaluation based on the Minnesota Prairie Plan and location in a Prairie Core, Corridor, or Complex, every proposed project is evaluated using Survey information on: 1) native prairie sites, 2) rare, threatened and endangered species locations, and 3) areas of biodiversity significance.

The selection criteria also recognize the importance of building on existing complexes and reducing fragmentation. If a prairie is small or isolated, the animal and plant species that live there are at risk. The best approach is conserving larger areas, like the Prairie Plan's cores/complexes/corridors, that have the scale, species diversity, and connectivity to support functioning prairie systems over the long-term.

The numbers shared above demonstrate this program's success at identifying and protecting biologically significant lands located in areas with existing complexes of habitat and protected lands.

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

- Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan
- Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Preservation Area (HPA) Final Environmental Impact Statement

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.

Three quarters of the carbon dioxide emissions driven by humans have occurred since 1950. We have seen a nearly 70% average decline of birds, amphibians, mammals, fish and reptiles since just 1970. A key component of our evaluation of the conservation significance of a habitat easement or fee acquisition is TNC's Resilient and Connected Network analysis (RCN). The RCN analysis we engage in for every acquisition project determines the climate resiliency of the habitat we're acquiring, and we prioritize acquisitions of habitat with higher climate resiliency. Higher climate resiliency is critical for species to survive and thrive in a world that faces significant climate change and biodiversity loss. Once acquired, we take actions to protect, better manage and restore habitat to maximize biodiversity and climate resiliency, including the use of locally wild-collected seeds (local ecotypes) for prairie restorations.

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this proposal?

Prairie

- Protect, enhance, and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests, and oak savanna

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 targets areas with existing remnant native prairie and oak savanna, and the percentage of remnant prairie is one of the ranking factors used to evaluate and compare parcels submitted for consideration. To date, 5,258 acres (61%) added to the Refuge with OHF funding have been native prairie and 7,109 acres (87%) were located in either a Prairie Core or Corridor as defined by the Minnesota Prairie Plan.

Outcomes

Programs in prairie region:

- Remnant native prairies are part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and large and small wetlands ~ *The percent of native remnant prairie, as determined by the Minnesota Biological Survey and/or USFWS biologists, will be documented on each parcel. Surrounding natural habitat types and cropped areas will be evaluated as part of the ranking criteria for submitted parcels.*

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 project does not substitute or supplant any previous funding. The work described in this proposal would not be funded or completed without this appropriation.

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

Outdoor Heritage Funds will be used to purchase the land in fee title or to purchase perpetual habitat easements. The land and easements purchased will be transferred to the USFWS to become units of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge. Long term costs for restoration, management, and wildlife/habitat/easement monitoring will be funded through annual USFWS operations funding.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Annually	USFWS Annual Service Operating funds	Monitoring and management by USFWS managers, biologists, field staff, and realty staff to ensure the long-term health of these habitats is maintained. Activities may include burning as well as mechanical, biological, and chemical treatments.	-	-

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 Nature Conservancy is committed to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice, which are embedded in our code of conduct and values. We recognize that conservation is best advanced by the leadership and contributions of people of diverse backgrounds, experiences, and identities. Our hiring practices have been updated to be more inclusive. Additionally, we recognize that BIPOC and other marginalized communities experience disproportionate access to nature on private lands, making it essential to provide public lands that are accessible to, and safe for, all Minnesotans; and where diverse communities will feel welcome and safe to pursue their passions for hunting, angling, photography, hiking, and simply enjoying all the benefits that nature provides. This program, if funded, will add to the availability of lands included in the Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge, and acquired fee parcels will be open for all Minnesotans, including BIPOC and other disadvantaged communities, to enjoy.

Activity Details

Requirements

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:

We will follow the county/township board notification processes as directed by current statutory language.

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

Yes

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

Yes

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:

Short-term planting of agricultural crops is an accepted Best Management Practice for preparing a site for prairie restoration. For example, short-term use of soybeans could be used to prepare seedbeds prior to prairie plantings, which has been proven effective in decreasing the need for subsequent invasives control activities, and can shorten the amount of time that additional weed control is needed on the site. In some cases this may necessitate the use of GMO products to facilitate herbicide use to control invasives.

Neonicotinoid treated seeds will not be used. We anticipate that the use of agricultural crops would not exceed 3 years on any given OHF-acquired property, and in most cases will be considerably shorter.

Will insecticides or fungicides (including neonicotinoid and fungicide treated seed) be used within any activities of this proposal 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?

Yes

Describe any variation from the State of Minnesota regulations:

Land acquired in fee title will be open to public hunting and fishing 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:

- National Wildlife Refuge

Will the eased land be open for public use?

No

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

Yes

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

Lands protected with conservation easements often include private roads or trails used by the landowners on their property

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

Yes

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?

Landowners with easements may continue to use currently existing private roads or trails on their property

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 through LSOHC in the past?

Yes

Are any of these past appropriations still OPEN?

Yes

Approp Year	Funding Amount Received	Amount Spent to Date	Funding Remaining	% Spent to Date
2024	\$4,412,000	-	-	-
2022	\$3,870,000	\$1,636	\$3,868,364	0.04%
2021	\$3,280,000	\$544,096	\$2,735,904	16.59%
2020	\$2,295,000	\$1,907,961	\$387,039	83.14%
2019	\$2,383,000	\$1,458,164	\$924,836	61.19%
2018	\$1,893,000	\$1,833,628	\$59,372	96.86%
2017	\$2,683,000	\$2,519,167	\$163,833	93.89%
2016	\$2,754,000	\$2,712,915	\$41,085	98.51%
2015	\$3,430,000	\$3,428,228	\$1,772	99.95%
2014	\$2,450,000	\$2,449,400	\$600	99.98%
2012	\$1,580,000	\$1,579,900	\$100	99.99%
2011	\$1,720,000	\$1,715,100	\$4,900	99.72%
2010	\$2,041,000	\$2,041,000	-	100.0%
Totals	\$34,791,000	\$22,191,195	\$12,599,805	63.78%

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Closing of approximately 150 acres of fee acquisitions and approximately 2,100 acres of easement acquisitions	June 30, 2029
Grassland and wetland restoration and enhancement activities on all acquired parcels to be completed.	June 30, 2033

Budget**Totals**

Item	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$968,700	\$200,000	USFWS	\$1,168,700
Contracts	\$996,000	-	-	\$996,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$750,000	\$150,000	PF NAWCA	\$900,000
Easement Acquisition	\$5,250,000	-	-	\$5,250,000
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$32,500	-	-	\$32,500
Professional Services	\$306,000	-	-	\$306,000
Direct Support Services	\$208,100	-	-	\$208,100
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$36,000	-	-	\$36,000
Supplies/Materials	\$435,000	-	-	\$435,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$8,982,300	\$350,000	-	\$9,332,300

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
TNC Staff	3.54	3.0	\$968,700	-	-	\$968,700
USFWS In-kind/Volunteer Contributions	0.0	0.0	-	\$200,000	USFWS	\$200,000

Amount of Request: \$8,982,300**Amount of Leverage:** \$350,000**Leverage as a percent of the Request:** 3.9%**DSS + Personnel:** \$1,176,800**As a % of the total request:** 13.1%**Easement Stewardship:** -**As a % of the Easement Acquisition:** -

Total Leverage (from above)	Amount Confirmed	% of Total Leverage	Amount Anticipated	% of Total Leverage
\$350,000	\$350,000	100.0%	-	0.0%

Detail leverage sources and confirmation of funds:

The Personnel line includes USFWS in-kind support. The fee acquisitions w/out PILT line includes leverage from Pheasants Forever that will be paid for through a North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant.

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?

As it is more efficient to purchase larger parcels and acreages, a reduction of 50% of the requested funding would likely result in a reduction of deliverables to approximately 45-50% of the proposed amounts.

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

We are anticipating that personnel and DSS expenses would be reduced approximately proportionally to the overall budget.

If the project received 30% of the requested funding

Describe how the scaling would affect acres/activities and if not proportionately reduced, why?

As it is more efficient to purchase larger parcels and acreages, a reduction of 70% of the requested funding would likely result in a reduction of deliverables to approximately 25-30% of the proposed amounts.

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

We are anticipating that personnel and DSS expenses would be reduced approximately proportionally to the overall budget.

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?

This proposal is the continuation of several years of funded Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge grants that, as described above, have resulted in protecting approximately 8,500 acres to date to be managed as part of the National Wildlife Refuge. Continuity of funding across multiple phases allows us flexibility when prioritizing parcels for protection, ensures stability in our staffing model that gives us the ability to plan and prioritize projects, and allows negotiations with landowners and their families over multiple years. This flexibility is essential to continue to achieve the conservation goals so important for these endangered habitat types, given the uncertainty of when priority parcels may be available on the open market.

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?

These funds are entirely for restoration and enhancement work. While this program targets primarily high-quality habitats, small areas included in the acquisition projects may need enhancement and/or restoration. It is anticipated that the majority of the contract work will consist of woody species removal, invasives removal, and seeding.

Professional Services

What is included in the Professional Services line?

- Appraisals
- Other : Environmental Assessments
- Surveys
- Title Insurance and Legal Fees

Fee Acquisition

What is the anticipated number of fee title acquisition transactions?

It is anticipated that this program will acquire approximately 150 acres in fee title in 2+/- closed acquisition transactions.

Travel

Does the amount in the travel line include equipment/vehicle rental?

Yes

Explain the amount in the travel line outside of traditional travel costs of mileage, food, and lodging

Rental car expense is also included.

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?

DSS is based on The Nature Conservancy's Federal Negotiated Rate (FNR) as proposed and approved by the US Dept. of Interior on an annual basis. In this proposal we are requesting reimbursement of 7.5% of eligible base costs as determined by our annual FNR and based on suggestions from the Council in prior years' hearings. The FNR is not applied to capital equipment over \$50,000 or land acquisition. The amount requested for reimbursement represents less than one-third of the total reimbursable costs allowed under the FNR. Examples of expenses included in the FNR include services from in-house legal counsel; finance; human resources; and information technology support, all of which contribute directly to the implementation of the project. If we were to include as leverage the additional project implementation expenses over and above the 7.5%, our \$350,000 of leverage in this proposal would increase by \$450,693, resulting in an increased leverage amount totaling 8.9% of the proposed budget total.

Other Equipment/Tools

Give examples of the types of Equipment and Tools that will be purchased?

Chainsaws, safety equipment and other equipment and tools needed for prairie restoration and enhancement needs.

Federal Funds

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

Yes

Are the funds confirmed?

Yes

- Cash : \$150,000
- In Kind : \$200,000

Is Confirmation Document attached?

[Yes](#)

Output Tables**Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)**

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	150	0	0	150
Protect in Easement	0	2,100	0	0	2,100
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	2,250	0	0	2,250

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

Type	Native Prairie (acres)
Restore	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	75
Protect in Easement	1,325
Enhance	0
Total	1,400

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	-	\$1,122,800	-	-	\$1,122,800
Protect in Easement	-	\$7,859,500	-	-	\$7,859,500
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	\$8,982,300	-	-	\$8,982,300

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	150	0	150
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	2,100	0	2,100
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	2,250	0	2,250

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	-	-	-	\$1,122,800	-	\$1,122,800
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$7,859,500	-	\$7,859,500
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	\$8,982,300	-	\$8,982,300

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	-	\$7,485	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	\$3,742	-	-
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	-	-	-	\$7,485	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$3,742	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Parcels

Sign-up Criteria?

[Yes - Sign up criteria is attached](#)

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

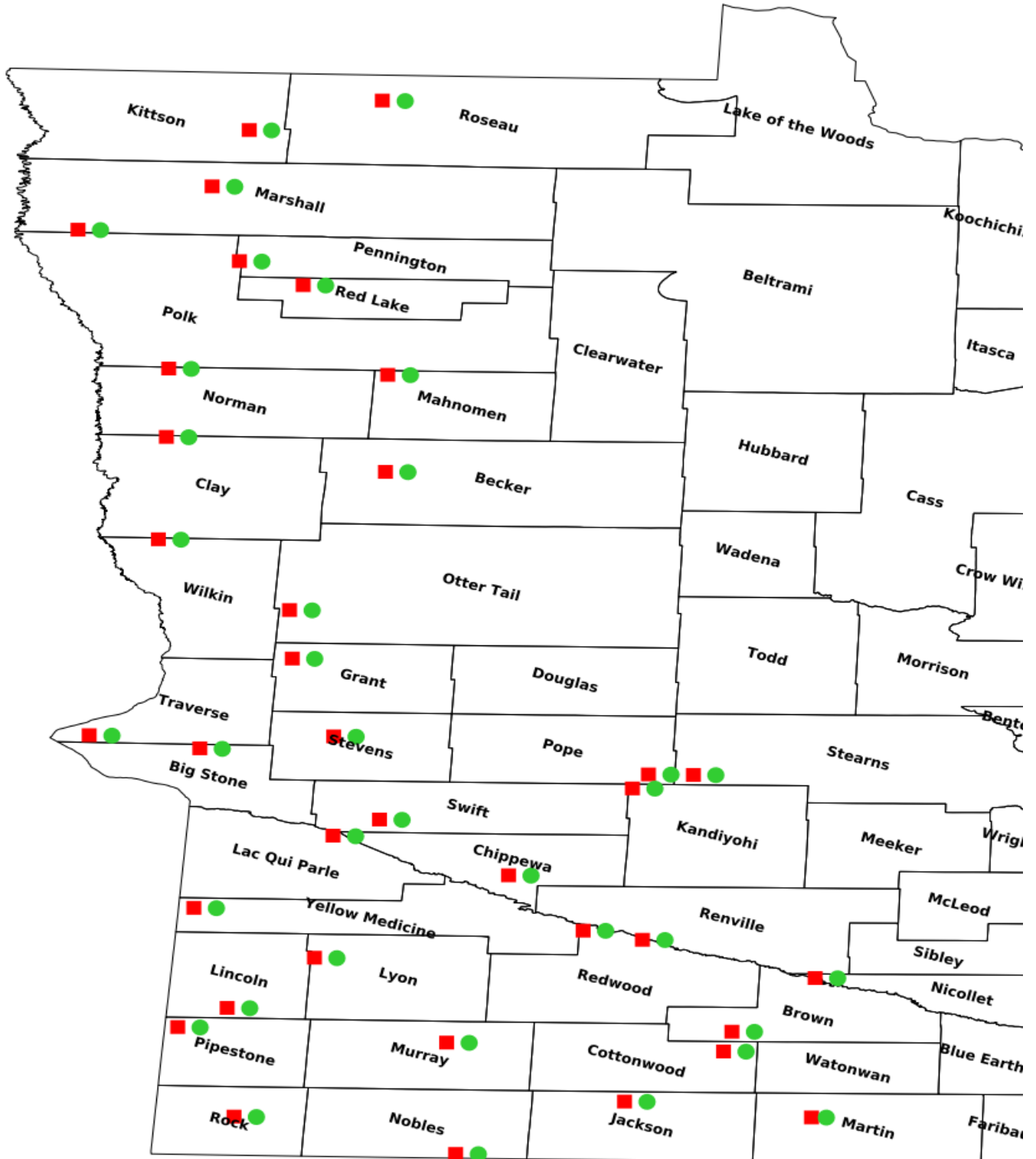
Submitted parcels will be prioritized and selected according to criteria that include: the amount of native remnant prairie on the parcel, location in a Minnesota Prairie Plan priority area (Prairie Core, Corridor, or Complex), adjacency to existing protected lands and habitat complexes, and presence of federally or state listed plant and animal species and Species in Greatest Need of Conservation.

Protect Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
NA	Becker	14142233	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Becker	14142236	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Big Stone	12446209	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Big Stone	12446212	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Brown	10834213	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Brown	10834216	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Chippewa	11739216	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Chippewa	11739213	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Clay	14247201	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Clay	14247204	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Cottonwood	10734220	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Cottonwood	10734223	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Grant	13044233	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Grant	13044236	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Jackson	10436222	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Jackson	10436219	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Kandiyohi	12236210	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Kandiyohi	12236207	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Kittson	16045206	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Kittson	16045203	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Lac qui Parle	11943209	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Lac qui Parle	11943212	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Lincoln	10945217	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Lincoln	10945214	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Lyon	11243215	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Lyon	11243218	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Mahnomen	14642211	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Mahnomen	14642208	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Marshall	15746216	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Marshall	15746213	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Martin	10332217	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Martin	10332215	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Murray	10740210	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Murray	10740207	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Nicollet	11132208	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Nicollet	11132211	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Nobles	10140228	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Nobles	10140225	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Norman	14647204	99	\$1,000	Yes
NA	Norman	14647201	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Otter Tail	13244202	99	\$1,000	No

NA	Otter Tail	13244205	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Pennington	15345230	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Pennington	15345227	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Pipestone	10846219	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Pipestone	10846222	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Polk	15449204	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Polk	15449201	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Pope	12336213	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Pope	12336216	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Red Lake	15144201	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Red Lake	15144204	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Redwood	11336204	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Redwood	11336201	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Renville	11437219	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Renville	11437222	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Rock	10345228	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Rock	10345225	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Roseau	16242210	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Roseau	16242207	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Stearns	12335213	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Stearns	12335216	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Stevens	12543213	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Stevens	12543216	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Swift	12042209	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Swift	12042212	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Traverse	12548222	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Traverse	12548219	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Wilkin	13647205	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Wilkin	13647202	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Yellow Medicine	11546224	99	\$1,000	No
NA	Yellow Medicine	11546221	99	\$1,000	No

Parcel Map



0 17 34 51 mi

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

Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge - Phase 15

Funding Requested: \$8,981,500



Program Goals

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and The Nature Conservancy will work together to protect native prairie and wildlife habitat in Minnesota for present and future generations.

Phase 15 Goals

The requested funding will allow us to permanently conserve approximately 1,900 acres of native prairie and wildlife habitat in western and central Minnesota. Planned outcomes include:

- 150 acres of fee acquisition
- 2,100 acres of permanent conservation easements

This work will target areas identified as having significant biodiversity by the Minnesota Biological Survey and as priority areas in the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan.

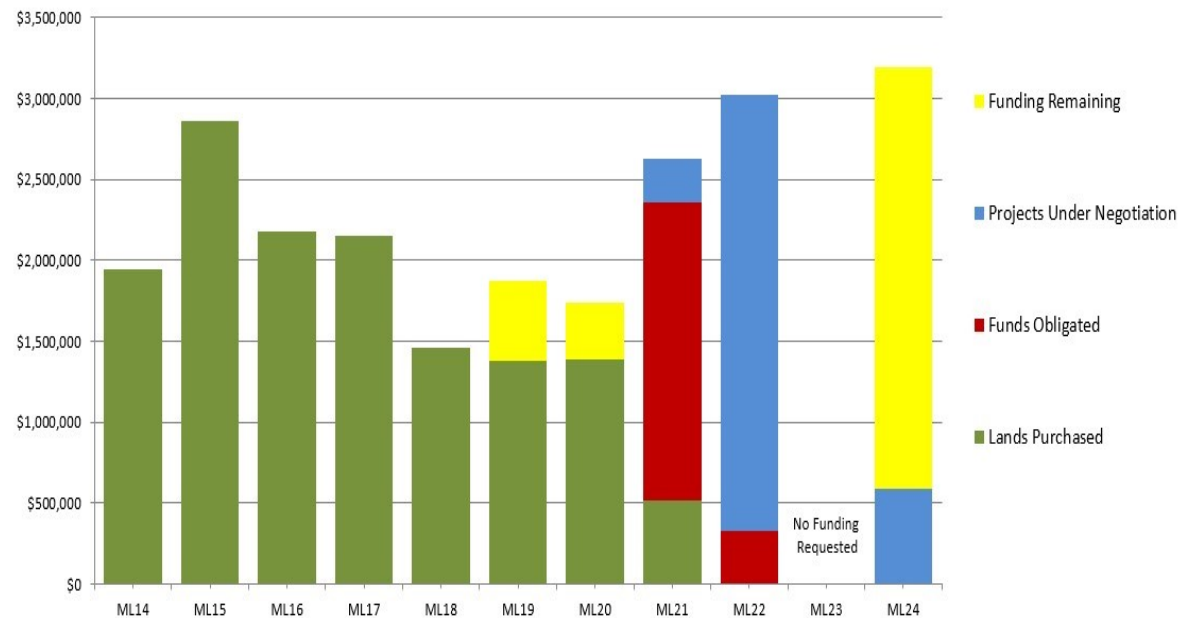


Native Prairie - OHF funding for this program protected this parcel containing 130 acres of well managed grazing lands, 81% of which is native prairie and contains critical habitat.



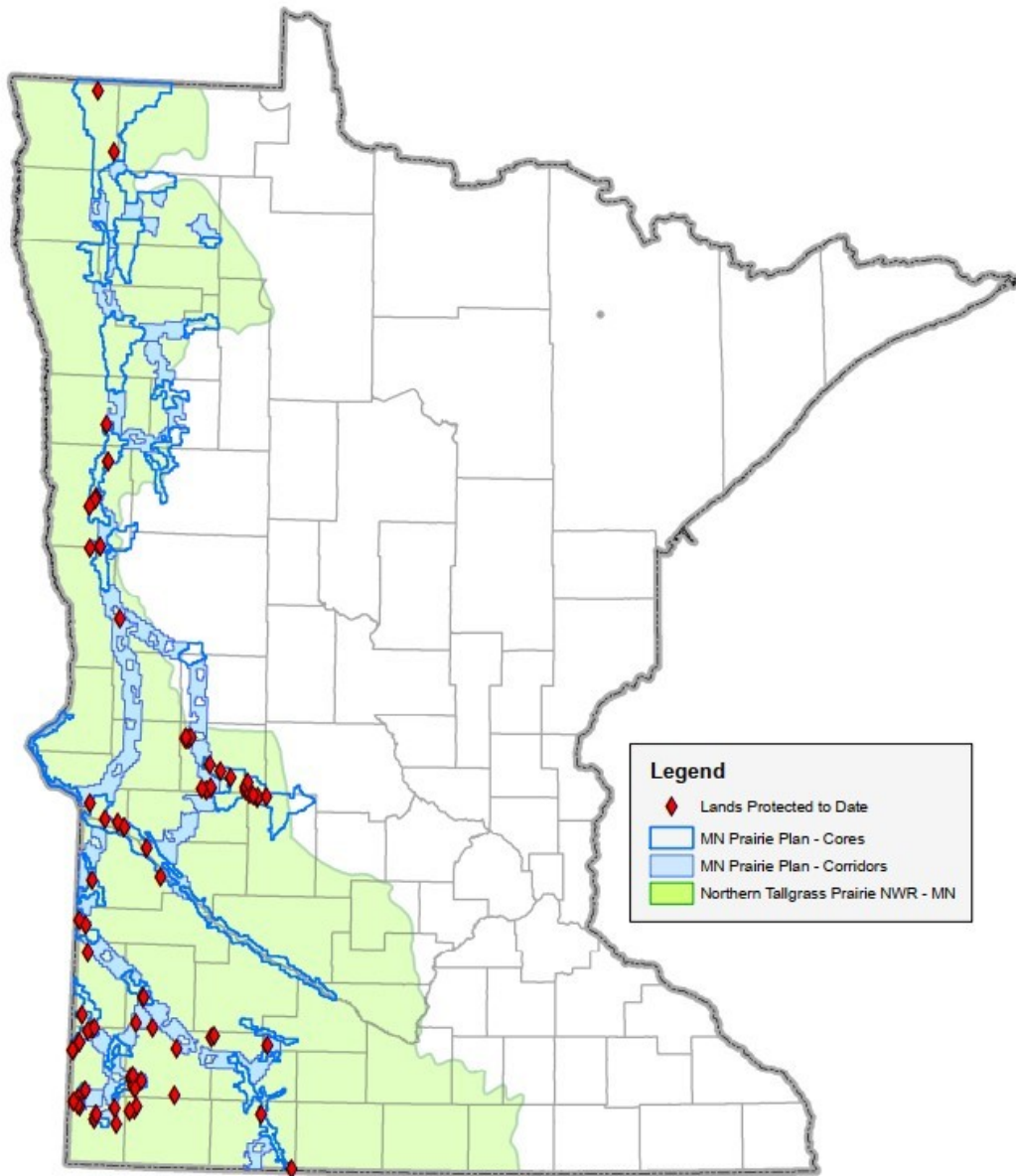
The Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge, managed by the US FWS, has protected more than 14,199 acres of native prairie and associated habitats, including 8,578 acres with OHF funding through prior rounds of this Program.

Financial Update — Status of Acquisition Funding from Previous OHF Rounds



Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge

Lands Protected with OHF-Funding



Program Accomplishments through May 2024

- 8,578 acres of habitat permanently protected at an average purchase price of \$2,270 per acre
- 5,258 acres of untilled native prairie protected
- 691 acres of wetlands and over 28 miles of stream or lakefront protected
- 87% of projects completed are in MN Prairie Plan priority areas
- Protected habitat for endangered and threatened species, species of concern, and other wildlife, including: Wilson's phalarope, short-eared owl, Dakota skipper, Topeka shiner, Blanding's turtle, small white lady's slipper, prairie bush clover, and sandhill cranes.

Prioritizing Projects

Each project is reviewed using the following criteria:

- 1) Is there native prairie on the tract? If not, is it adjacent to native prairie?
- 2) Is the property in a priority area identified in the MN Prairie Plan?
- 3) Is it adjacent to an existing complex of permanently protected habitat?
- 4) Was it identified by the Minnesota Biological Survey as having concentrations of threatened and endangered species, species of concern, and rare communities?
- 5) Is it suitable for public recreation?

Parcel Selection Criteria used by the US Fish & Wildlife Service and The Nature Conservancy for the Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge Land Acquisition Program

The purpose of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie Protection National Wildlife Refuge Program is to accelerate progress towards the US Fish & Wildlife Service's (USFWS) goal of permanently protecting and enhancing 77,000 acres of prairie remnants across the broad area originally covered by the Northern Tallgrass Prairie. The Land Acquisition Program supports the acquisition of fee title or conservation easements in the 49 western Minnesota counties included in the refuge boundary. The USFWS and The Nature Conservancy (Conservancy) are partners in this Program.

Parcels are reviewed by both the USFWS and Conservancy to ensure that they meet the priorities of both partners. They are then submitted to LSOHC staff for final review/approval. This review is based on the following criteria:

1. **Native prairie on all or most of tract, or adjacency to existing native prairie.** The emphasis of this Program is protecting and enhancing native prairie, as identified by DNR Biological Survey or site inspection by trained biologist. Protecting native prairie includes the need to buffer and connect native remnants via restoration of non-native lands. The partners will identify and work with private landowners to acquire tracts that further our shared goal of native prairie conservation, and in particular, those that meet the other criteria listed below.
2. **Within core area boundary or in critical corridors between core areas.** This Program will assist with building "functioning landscapes" by focusing in areas with concentrations of existing native prairie. The 2017 Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan identified 28 prairie cores and connecting corridors within the Refuge. The partners will give priority to those parcels that are within these core areas or that help form critical corridors to maintain landscape function.
3. **Near existing protected lands.** Building larger protected complexes is preferred to simplify and reduce overall management costs and travel time. In general, larger protected blocks are more effective at conserving the full array of wildlife species and biological diversity. The partners will strategically identify properties that are in areas where the USFWS already has a presence and prioritize these higher than those that are isolated.
4. **Greater habitat and species diversity, or host to unique species.** Parcels that host a rare habitat or a continuum of habitats, such as interconnected upland, wetland, riparian, and stream features, will be recognized as having added ecological value and given greater priority. Tracts with underrepresented, small-scale features (e.g. threatened species), will also be prioritized.
5. **Suitability for public recreation.** Constitutional language requires that the lands purchased in fee title be open to the public taking of fish and game. Fee title lands purchased with this grant will be opened. Lands especially suited to these uses will be given a higher priority. Conservation easements purchased with Outdoor Heritage Fund support will be open to hunting only with landowner permission.

6. **Willing Seller.** We will only work with willing sellers, and those that can abide by the statutory process laid out for use of public funds. We work with landowners to ensure that they are comfortable with the Program and how it will affect their property.
7. **Avoid buildings.** Existing buildings pose a challenge because they may not be eligible for Outdoor Heritage Fund use and they require additional effort to demolish or sell. Properties with structures are carefully reviewed to ensure that they do not place an undue burden on the USFWS or Conservancy.